Safehome

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Safehome

by DBMars

Summary

On the run, Will and Hannibal lay low for a month in a safehouse in rural Iowa.

“We could disappear now. Tonight. Feed your dogs, leave a note for Alana, and never see her or Jack again. Almost polite.”

Will’s mind railed against the words. His resistance was powerful at first, like the failure of a mighty dam holding back a river, the water pounding down to the valley below. No. Of course not. Hannibal had to pay for what he’d done to Abigail Hobbs. Jack Crawford was his friend and on the right side of the law. The plan to betray Hannibal would go down exactly as they’d plotted together.

But then...

Will opened his mouth to artfully refuse.
Instead, he heard himself say, “Let’s go.”

This is a finished, polished version of my DoMAYstic 2023 prompt challenge completed with twitter x threads. I was saving it to publish in May of 2024 with more smut and better writing, and then suddenly I realized IT'S JUNE AND I FORGOT TO POST IT.

So, anyway. If you're looking for a comfort fic, this is pretty damn sweet. And if you've ever lived in the Midwest, well... you get it.

Housewarming

Baltimore, 2014

“We could disappear now. Tonight. Feed your dogs, leave a note for Alana, and never see her or Jack again. Almost polite.”

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But after the first deluge, the reservoir dwindled. The mighty cataracts trickled away to streams. Hannibal killed Beverly. Will had gotten her involved, and it was his fault she was dead. The least he could do was avenge her. And what about Georgia Madchen and… everyone else?

Hannibal’s eyes were luminously velvet in the flickering candlelight of the dinner table. This would all be so much easier if he weren’t so… Will swallowed hard, the gourmet food roiling in his stomach.

“I don't need a sacrifice. Do you?" That smooth voice that had lived in his head, tortured him in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. A serpent’s tongue speaking the words of a black and poisoned heart. How could he even think…?

The streams became trickles. And then, the reservoir of denial was dry, the ruins of engineering gleaming wetly in the sun.

And Hannibal was looking at him now, expression outwardly mild. But Will could sense his desperation and hope the way he could read a killer’s design. Felt them twisting around him like the twin snakes Mercury’s caduceus. *Please say yes*, he heard in his mind, so loud he thought for a moment that Hannibal had spoken.

Will opened his mouth to artfully refuse.

Instead, he heard himself say, “Let’s go.”

Hannibal’s plush lips parted for a nearly inaudible intake of breath.

The words had tumbled out of Will’s mouth, and he couldn’t take it back. And once it had been uttered, he didn’t want to. Couldn’t imagine picking up the phone and alerting Jack. In no version of reality was there yet another double-cross. He’d given up and given in, and now he belonged to the Chesapeake Ripper.

Hannibal lifted his wine glass and held it out for a toast. Will mirrored the motion. The crystal sang a single, final note like the penultimate chord of an aria. There was no going back.

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The dogs were fed. Will wept while doing it, glad that Hannibal was waiting outside and couldn't see him. He wrote the note to Alana, set it on the kitchen table, and they left.

It would take a few months for the fake passports to be ready and everything arranged in Europe for their eventual relocation, Hannibal's millions working behind the scenes to pave the way. Until then, they had to lay low. Will Graham and Dr. Hannibal Lecter walked away from everything with a bag each, stole a car, and drove deep into the rural Midwest.

The drive was tense and quiet, both of them taking turns at the wheel and sleeping, though Hannibal did more than his fair share. Will's stretches of rest were dreamless; he woke with a stiff neck and pins and needles in his limbs. At last, they came to a small town, not much more than a couple of churches, a gas station, and a grain elevator. They pulled up next to a beat-up green pickup truck in a church parking lot. There, Hannibal paid cash to an old man in red suspenders for a remote farmhouse that hadn't been lived in for years. Papers signed, keys given, and there they were, standing before a two bedroom, one-and-a-half bath white house with black shutters that sat on eight acres of land, the lawn a scraggly mess. Night falling. The power company hadn't turned the electricity back on yet, and even though it was the first of May, the night was cold enough they could see their breath. This far north, the snow hadn't been gone long.

Inside the house, the remaining furniture was covered with sheets, pale ghosts, creating a graveyard of indiscriminate shapes and shadows. No heat, no lights. They didn't talk much, searching through the house for anything useful to make the next few days pass more comfortably before the utilities came back to life. Hannibal found some candles in a kitchen drawer. Will examined the fireplace and chimney to make sure they were in good working order, then went out into the frosty night to gather wood. When he returned, he saw that Hannibal had found a full-size mattress in a bed upstairs and dragged it down in front of the fireplace, butting it up against the saggy couch.

Will felt muscle memory take over as he built the fire, repeating the same steps he knew by heart from years of camping and fishing trips. They sat up by candlelight, still not saying much. Will felt numb and tongue-tied. Hannibal retrieved a bottle of wine from his suitcase and opened it with his folding knife. They drank from the glasses Hannibal had packed (of course he had) and Will fed the fire, filling the room with heat. Still, they could hear the wind whistling across the empty fields, making the house shift and groan. It was cold.

"Home, sweet home," Will said softly.

Hannibal smiled faintly and repeated his words. "Home sweet home."

Midnight. Will built up the fire and stretched out on the couch as Hannibal settled down on the mattress. It was the space of a few feet that stretched between them, but it felt like a vast gulf to Will. He was cold. They hadn't packed blankets. He tried to sleep as the candles burned low, blowing on his hands, and pulling them into the sleeves of his green jacket.

"Will." Hannibal was laying on his side, looking at him. "Come down here."

"I'm good."

"You're cold." Hannibal shifted, opening half the mattress so Will could lay closest to the fire. He gestured at the empty space.

"I'm okay."

"Will." Doctor voice.

Will relented and slid off the couch onto the bed, switching sides with Hannibal, very aware of the other man's weight on the old mattress next to him. Already he stopped shivering, the warmth of the crackling fire washing over his body and seeping into his clothes.

"Better?"

"Much."

There was a stretch of silence. Will wondered if Hannibal had fallen asleep.

He jumped when a hand closed around his midsection. Hannibal froze. Will waited for his heart to slow down. Then he said, "Go ahead."

"It's cold," Hannibal explained.

"Right."

Hannibal spooned him from behind, sliding his arm under Will's head. Fully clothed but so, so intimate. After two years of wanting.

He was delightfully warm now, the fire in front and Hannibal behind him. *I'll never fall asleep*, he thought, hyper-aware of the cannibalistic serial killer cradling him. But the resistance was gone. There was only the steady march toward fate, toward their inevitable tragic end. Well, maybe not so tragic. Neither of them really deserved a happy ending, did they?

The thought was strangely comforting, and Will let himself relax into Hannibal's half-embrace. He slept.

A Stash...

Chapter Summary

> Will finds a stash of treasure in the attic that tells the love story of the people that used to live in the house.

Will woke up in a brief haze that cleared itself quickly. He'd moved around a lot as a child and had developed the ability to wake up from a deep sleep and remember where he was within parts of a second. The farmhouse. On the run. Stretched out on a mattress next to the cold hearth, fully dressed. Hannibal was gone, but his jacket was draped over Will, and he realized he'd had it pulled close around his shoulders, snuggling into it unconsciously as he slept. He let himself put his nose against the collar and inhale. Amber and spice, musk, and something masculine and floral. Cannibal or no, Hannibal always smelled *so* good. Will smirked for a private moment, thinking about how he'd purposely marinated in Old Spice before walking into the courtroom on the day of Hannibal's testimony, just to piss him off. His one act of rebellion, his one moment of control.

But all that was over now. As much as he'd seethed in that courtroom, listening to Hannibal lie, and then the mute terror of hearing his tormentor trying to get him *out* of prison for reasons that were unclear at the time… now, it seemed like a vague, half-formed nightmare that was farther away in his mind and far more alien than the strange house that sheltered him now.

It was very quiet in the country. He could hear the birds outside, and that was it.

Hannibal must have gone to ditch the stolen car and pay cash for another one, and pick up a couple quick essentials, as they'd planned yesterday. The house was perfectly silent. No furnace, no hum of a refrigerator. Will didn't expect loneliness to string barbed wire around his heart, but it did. He'd spent so much time alone, had come to expect it and embrace it, pretending it was what he really wanted. Now, solitude ached like a bone-break fever.

He distracted himself the best way he knew — doing something useful. Will went from room to room uncovering furniture and gathering the sheets up, stuffing them in the washing machine. No soap, no hot water, but they could still be used for warmth. He surveyed the appliances, explored the outbuildings. He found some old but usable tools, ladders, a lawnmower he might be able to get running.

The house had been advertised as furnished. But it was strange, what was left behind by the previous occupants. Nothing of value, surely, but there were dishes in the cupboards and musty clothes in the closets. He was embarrassed to find drawers of underwear – literal granny panties and old man briefs. He figured the parents of the man they'd bought the house

from had lived here. Now, the couple must live in nursing homes or were long gone, their son never bothering to empty out most of their belongings.

In the upper hallway, between the two bedrooms, was a pull rope. Will pulled it slowly, and a narrow set of attic stairs came down with a shower of dust. He ascended carefully, armed with a small flashlight he kept on his keychain.

In the attic, he found a raccoon that was as surprised to see him as Will was to catch demonic glowing eyes in the dim and dusty space, gleaming in the small beam of his flashlight. The creature scurried out a hole in the roof. “Fuck,” he cursed, clutching his chest a moment, and taking a deep breath.

Will descended again and went out to the shed, where he found old boards, nails, and a hammer. Hauling it all inside and up the narrow little entrance, he barricaded the hole in the roof that had allowed the raccoon inside. After he’d finished, the sun was high enough that the attic windows received more illumination, allowing him to search it more thoroughly, both for useful items and more holes to cover.

The small space was full of junk and treasures alike, including a cedar chest under a tarp that brimmed with personal items — documents, photo albums, baby clothes. He gathered the contents in a crate and took them downstairs to the kitchen table. With nothing else to do, he began to read and sort through his discoveries like they were historical artifacts of great import.

When Hannibal returned, hours had passed. Will was at the table squinting in the failing light, deciphering the attic treasures. After making space on the table, they sat down to eat the the basic provisions Hannibal had brought home, and Will told him all about the family that had lived in the house. “Interesting finds,” he said, laying out the series of pictures. “I think the mother here with the dark hair is named Viola. Her sons are Russel and Robert. There’s a wedding photo of Russel, but then look at these.” He pointed out the picture of Robert sitting alone in the living room. “You can see Russel’s photo in the background but he’s not in any more pictures. I think he was killed in the war. He was Air Force. I found some documents talking about Robert being a Seabee.”

“A Seabee?”

“A naval engineer. I think he was in the Pacific. He got married.” Will handed Hannibal a worn shoebox. Inside were packets of letters tied with faded ribbons. “All their WWII letters. Bob and Millie.”

Hannibal ran his long fingers gently across the piles of letters. “It bothers you,” he said, “that someone would leave these behind.”

Will nodded. “This is… treasure,” he said. “D’you have any idea what I’d give to have something like this f-from my family?” He sighed. “I don’t know. Maybe it’s… futile, wanting to-to understand yourself better through… things like this from your own people. But if we ever had anything — it got lost in the moves, or Dad threw it out.” He paused. “Or my mother took them when she left.”

There was a shared burden and silence. Will deliberately didn't look at Hannibal, just cleared his throat and continued. "So, Russel, he, ah, he had a son he never met." He slid a couple more pictures of the brothers across the table. "This is Millie and I think this is Russel's wife. He must have gotten her pregnant, then left for the war and didn't come back." His finger lingered on the image of the fresh-faced girl with the rounded belly, wearing a gingham dress, hair curled up, signature 1940s dark lipstick on. "They were just kids. She can't be older than 20. Widowed."

"Generational trauma," Hannibal said, and Will nodded.

They finished eating in thoughtful silence. Will carefully packed everything back up in the crate, but Hannibal took the box of letters into the living room. He untied the ribbons as Will built the fire again. They opened the bottle of wine Hannibal had somehow returned with and sat opposite one another on the sagging sofa.

Hannibal handed him a stack of letters and set another in his lap. "I'll be Millie," he said with a Cheshire smile. "And you'll be Robert." He opened an envelope and eased it open gently. "My dear Bob, I am thinking of you every single day. Did you hear yet that Samantha is pregnant? Russel will be so proud. Every night I'm praying for you and thinking about you. Your mother was sick for a bit and had us worried, but she's on the mend. She was pretty scared. I never knew she had the flu in 1918 and almost didn't survive. Well, I'd better tell you before someone else does that your cousin Maureen eloped with that boy from Clear Lake nobody likes. I wonder where you are tonight. I keep thinking any second, you're going to walk around the corner, or I'll see you walk through the door. I best stop or I'll cry. All my love, Millie."

Will opened the first letter in his stack, smiling now, too, as he tilted the gossamer sheet of paper toward the candle at his elbow. "Dear Millie, I can't stop thinking about how beautiful you are when you dance. You are the prettiest gal I've ever had the privilege to dance with. All the boys here want to see your picture. I've been telling them you're a real jive bomber. They say you're a dish." Will chuckled at the '40s era slang. Then it occurred to him that to Hannibal, it was possible someone could be a literal dish. Still, he continued. "They keep us pretty good here. I get a little bit of a hard time since I'm older than a lot of the guys. They call me the old man, but the joke's on them, because I'll be an ensign soon, and these anchor-crankers will be answering to me. The sky was so clear last night, I went out and thought about you looking up at the same stars out on the farm…"

The world softened, went sepia, as they traveled back in time, living the words of two people longing desperately for one another.

A List...

Chapter Summary

Hannibal makes a shopping list that Walmart cannot handle.

Will examined the slip of paper Hannibal had just given him. “I, uhm… this is quite a list.”

“It’s better for us to make as few trips into public as possible, so stocking up is essential.” The electricity had come on, and Hannibal was cleaning out the twenty-year-old refrigerator with hot water (at last!) and dish soap, sleeves rolled up. Will was talking to him through the little window that opened between the kitchen and the dining room, an unmistakably endearing architectural feature of the farmhouse.

“No, I get that, it’s just, ah… I’m going to the only Walmart in a hundred-mile radius in rural Iowa, and I’m gonna go out on a limb and say that they won’t have…” he checked the list, “goji berries.”

“It doesn’t hurt to look,” Hannibal pointed out.

“Okay… I’ll do what I can with… this… and I’ll be back in about three hours.” He went to the door and retrieved his jacket, shoving the list in his pocket. Just as he reached for the front door, he noticed Hannibal pulling on his coat as well. “What are you doing?”

“Coming with you,” Hannibal said.

“Being together increases the chances of getting caught,” Will reminded him. “And the obviously European guy with the distinctive cheekbones is, ah, probably *not* the one we should send into Walmart.”

Hannibal smiled as he buttoned his coat. “You think my cheekbones are distinctive?”

Will felt heat rush to his own cheeks. “Walmarts have security cameras. Hell, there might even be wanted posters of us up on the bulletin board inside the front fucking door.”

“I’ll wait in the truck,” Hannibal promised, “if you don’t mind the company for the drive.”

Will shoved a ball cap over his hair. “Sure. I mean. You can. Come.”

“Excellent. Shall we?”

“Hold up.” Will went back to the kitchen for a moment and returned with something he’d found in a drawer while they were cleaning and searching the house. It was a mechanical shopping list that must have belonged to the former tenants. It featured a list of basic food

items like coffee, flour, beer, and bread, and there were little metal tabs one could switch from white to red, indicating what was needed at the store. The top of the contraption, which resembled an old-fashioned wall thermometer more than anything, had a picture of a rooster enameled onto it that said, *"Rise and Shine!"*

"This is what you can choose from," Will said with a little smirk, handing it to Hannibal to examine.

"I notice goji berries are not on this list," Hannibal said as they got in the pickup.

Will laughed. It was the first time he'd laughed since they'd left Virginia. It felt good.

As Hannibal had promised, he stayed in the car during Will's long and winding exploration of the remote Walmart, keeping his head down and not speaking to anyone. After loading the small, dented pickup truck Hannibal had purchased after ditching the stolen car, they turned around and headed back toward the homestead.

"Look," Hannibal pointed out. There was a hand-painted sign on the side of the road that said *Threadtown Grocery* with an arrow pointing down another country road. According to the weathered signage, it was an Amish grocery and discount store, with hardware items available as well.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Will asked.

"Amish communities may not have CCTV," Hannibal replied.

"It'd be nice to, uhm… be able to go in together," Will admitted, turning onto the road indicated by the sign before Hannibal had even asked him to.

They found the store in a barn-like structure a few miles down the new route. There were cars in the lot, as well as black buggies, with their horses tied to hitching posts. "As long as nobody in there's making a Vine or a YouTube video or whatever the hell, we should be fine," Will said as they cautiously got out of the car.

The coast seemed clear, and they went in together to shop the aisles of staple foodstuffs and random items that Walmart didn't have, like wonderfully meaty legs of lamb, kielbasa sausages, and freshy fried and glazed apple cider doughnuts. It felt… *good*. Almost destabilizing in its normalcy as if they'd fallen through a portal into a different world, another universe. Intimate.

The feeling remained as they loaded the truck. Driving home was pleasant. They were chatty, the brooding nature of their flight from justice somehow forgotten, a fog blown away in a brisk breeze. At home, they unloaded the truck and stocked the shelves, discussing which cupboards were for what. "Are you sure you want the coffee up here?" Hannibal asked him. "Can you reach that high?"

"Oh, for fuck's– you're not *that* much taller than me, Dr. Lecter."

The cupboards and the refrigerator were full. Will remembered this feeling from when he was a boy, when the food stamps came in and they were able to purchase the month's groceries. The sensation of abundance and security made him warm, his face open to smiling.

When they were finished, they brewed some coffee and ate an Amish doughnut apiece.

Packed Lunch

Chapter Summary

Hannibal packs a little picnic for Will.

Will woke with a pained groan, his stiff muscles crying out plaintively. Since the heat had come back on, they'd moved the big mattress back upstairs to the old brass frame in the master bedroom. Hannibal was sleeping there. They hadn't discussed it; last night, he'd just gotten into a set of silk pajamas and crawled in, the light off but the door to the hallway left open.

Will had fled to what must have been a child's or a guest bedroom down the hall, which only had a twin-sized daybed. The mattress of said daybed had likely been purchased in the Regan era, and the one pancake-flat foam pillow was fucking awful. The night had been restless, and now he had a crick in his neck and a hard knot in his lower back.

Will got up and pulled on some work clothes, heading downstairs to find Hannibal in the kitchen, of course. "Good morning, Will. You slept in."

Will glanced at the clock as Hannibal bustled around cutting slices of bread and brewing coffee. It was almost 11. "I don't think I fell asleep until around two," he admitted. Even then he'd tossed and turned so much it'd felt like he hadn't had a minute of sleep.

"The weather's fine," Hannibal noted, nodding at the sunlight streaming through the kitchen window. "I thought we could go for a walk."

"Good plan," Will said, retrieving his boots from their place next to the door. "We should take a look at the property. Know our exits. Or ways the swat team could sneak up on us."

Hannibal smiled, pouring coffee into a huge old thermos, the outside decorated with a red plaid pattern and accented in tan. "Or we could simply enjoy a walk." *Or we could socialize like adults. God forbid, we become friendly.*

"Two birds one stone," Will said, his heart doing a little trampoline flip. He watched Hannibal pack the thermos in a matching zip-top bag that he must have found here at the house. The set was adorably vintage. "My dad had that exact same thermos," Will mused. "Took it to work with him every day for twenty years."

Hannibal handed him the thermos bag and quickly packed up an equally old-timely lunch pail. "The basement is full of treasure as well," he said. "Shall we?"

Will nodded and they went out the kitchen door, crossing the scraggly lawn and heading for the tree line. The stretch of timber was thick, but it was early enough in the spring that the

undergrowth wasn't bad yet. The lack of human neighbors had apparently encouraged animals to call it home, and they saw rabbits, numerous birds, squirrels, and startled two deer who fled, flashing their white tails.

The trees broke after a little while, revealing a wonderful surprise — a pond. Will felt himself smiling, mind already working overtime thinking about if he could fish it and what he might catch. A heron took flight as they approached, and a couple of turtles splashed back into the water from a pondside log. "The property line probably ends about half an acre from the other side of this pond," Will surmised. He turned to look at Hannibal, but he wasn't standing at Will's side anymore.

Instead, he was getting comfortable on a thick fallen log. Turning, he looked up at Will and patted the space next to him. Will hesitated a moment, then sat down. As far as logs went, and he'd sat on his fair share, it was wide and comfortable. Hannibal carefully poured him a cup of coffee from the thermos, adding the requisite sugars, and handed him a sandwich. Sliced turkey and Swiss with some mustard, nothing exciting, except Hannibal had made the bread himself and Will didn't remember anything ever tasting so good.

They ate and watched quietly as the animals re-emerged from hiding. "How's the daybed?" Hannibal asked after they finished eating, enjoying the simple serenity of the landscape.

"Terrible," Will admitted, rubbing his neck. "The couch might be better. Or maybe next time we hit up Walmart we could get an air mattress."

"Or," Hannibal suggested after a short silence, "we can share."

Will's brain buzzed white noise, groping for what to say.

Hannibal spoke again. "I didn't mind it at all when we had the mattress downstairs. You snore a little bit but it's very quiet. Rhythmic."

And then he waited for Will's response. His face was mild, his smile pleasant as he looked out over the pond, but Will didn't need his empathy powers to feel the taut string of hopeful tension that stretched between them.

"If you're sure you don't mind," he said at last.

"Not at all," Hannibal said.

Learning Something New

Chapter Summary

Will promises to teach Hannibal how to knit.

Will slept in late again to make up for the rest he'd lost the night before due to the torture device he'd slept on. The bigger bed was much more comfortable, and despite being a bundle of nerves about sleeping next to Hannibal, he'd passed out right after slipping between the sheets, hyper-aware of being clad only in a tee-shirt and boxers.

Suddenly, it was morning. The bed was empty, but still warm. Will slipped over to Hannibal's side and curled up for a few more minutes in the remnants of his body heat, smelling his cologne on the pillow. It'd been ages since he'd shared a bed with anyone and laying in the warm remnants of Hannibal's presence felt comforting and sweet in a way he couldn't fully explain.

After a shower and getting dressed, Will came downstairs to find eggs, coffee, and the last of the Amish doughnuts out on the table. Hannibal was washing dishes in the sink but paused to join Will for breakfast. "I've found another treasure," he said, indicating a 1970s edition of *Betty Crocker's Cookbook*. "This was Millie's."

Will thumbed through it, finding handwritten notes next to many of the recipes, and clippings from magazines and newspapers stuck in with yellowing Scotch tape, adding to the collection of recipes and notes. "Please tell me you're not thinking about making this." Will pointed to a recipe for a vegetable and bologna aspic.

"Why not?" Hannibal asked it innocently, but he had a brow raised in good humor. "It looks nutritious."

"It's got an, uhm... threatening aura," Will said with a smile of his own.

"Not to worry. This is what I'd like to make." Hannibal indicated a recipe tucked within that had been torn from something called "Red Star Yeast Centennial Bread Sampler 1981" It was called "Classic Rich Bread" and was accompanied by a rather jolly-looking drawing of a loaf of bread that took Will right back to his childhood.

"Looks good," Will said, sipping coffee.

"You can help me," Hannibal said, in a way that didn't make it sound like an option.

"Last time I *baked* something I was probably in the fifth grade," Will admitted. "With my Granny G."

"You're overdue for a lesson, then."

After breakfast, they began. Will had found a tiny radio in the basement. It had a terrible speaker, but Hannibal flipped it on to the classical station broadcast by local public radio, the pieces interrupted occasionally by a weather report. Hannibal assembled the ingredients as Will looked over the recipe. "Did you find a cooking thermometer?"

"No," Hannibal reported.

"So how are you supposed to know if the water for the yeast is 120 degrees?"

"Approximation. Like this." Hannibal started the tap, a large pot beneath to catch the excess water and not waste it. When it was steaming, he held his hand in the stream. "I've learned through experience that I can hold my hand in water that is approximately 115 degrees Fahrenheit. Feeling the sting, but not having to jerk my hand away. Try it." Hannibal took Will's hand and put it under the water with his own.

Their shoulders were touching. Will tried to focus on the water heating up his hand, but the heat of two shoulders touching through layers of fabric was somehow hotter. "Perfect," Hannibal said, catching some of the water in a measuring cup, then turning off the faucet. He snagged a dish towel from its place tucked in a drawer pull and dried off, then reached out with it, taking Will's hand, and drying it for him.

Why, Will thought, his mind racing, *was that so fucking intimate?*

The world got weird after that, blurry and watercolor, time passing fluidly, then with flashes of sudden sharp and immediate presence. Will hyper-focused on Hannibal's corded hands and forearms where his sleeves were rolled up, skin dusted with flour, kneading the bread dough over and over, then stepping aside and letting Will have a try. At last, Hannibal lifted the dough, formed it into a ball, and put it back in the bowl they'd used to mix it, covering it with another dish cloth. They cleaned up for the 20 minutes required rising, then transferred it to two greased loaf pans.

"Now how long?" Will asked as they washed up.

"Until the center rounds above the rim of the pan, about an inch."

"How long will that take?"

Hannibal untied his apron and put it down the laundry chute. "It takes the time it takes," he said.

Will didn't want to ask how they'd pass the time – it sounded like a weird pickup line. Instead, "Did you find any more Millie treasures worth sharing?"

"A box of knitting needles and some yarn. She didn't leave us any instructions, however."

"That's okay," Will said, putting his hands in his pockets with a little smirk. "I know how to knit. Well, I know the basic stitches."

Hannibal looked genuinely surprised.

"I used to get dumped off at my granny’s all the time before we moved away from her," Will said. "She taught me. My dad told me it was for girls and I shouldn't do it. But Granny G and I would work on stuff in secret. We made a blanket my dad never found out about."

Hannibal's expression was soft, his eyes glimmering the way they had when he'd walked in on Will's lecture on the Minnesota Shrike's “Copycat”. "Would you teach me?"

"Yeah," Will said. "I can do that."

Under the Same Umbrella

Chapter Summary

Will makes a little patio area for Hannibal to read outside in.

As Will slowly rose to consciousness and his eyes adjusted, he realized what the large maroon thing he had his face pressed against actually was.

It was Hannibal's back. They'd started the night on their separate sides of the bed, discreetly facing away from one another after lights out. But somehow in the night Will had shifted, and he was curled up like a child facing Hannibal. Not holding him, but cuddled up against him from behind, forehead resting on the silk of his pajama top. And his legs were bent right up against Hannibal's as well. Peas in a pod.

It was comfy, like this. Watching the subtle shifting movement as Hannibal breathed. The same lungs he'd used even as he choked the breath from Beverly. No remorse.

But Will had made his choice. The devil had beckoned, and he'd said a quick, simple, "Let's go."

There was too much going on in his head to go back to sleep. So many things he wanted to do, like slide his arm around Hannibal's middle, or dare to spoon him properly and bury his face in the back of the doctor's neck. Maybe even… kiss that spot.

That thought made him bolt, sneaking out of bed and dashing off to get some clothes on. Still, even as he stepped outside into the gorgeous spring day, the unexpressed whatever-it-was sat on his chest like a tormenting imp. Not knowing exactly what he planned to do, Will went out to one of the half-rotted sheds and poked around, picking through the junk left behind.

He ended up finding some old lawn furniture. Might be nice for the concrete slab the house sported in lieu of a real patio or deck. Sometimes they sat out there, but it was only good in the mornings; once the sun came around the other side of the roof it was too bright and felt like the concrete was a frying pan. Having something to create shade would make the space enjoyable all day.

Will found an entire patio set and went to work, trying to use hard labor to get his head on straight. About an hour later he'd cleaned up and repaired an aluminum table, umbrella, two chairs, and a lounge that needed some cushions. Nothing fancy, of course. And Millie's taste in umbrella patterns was *interesting,* to say the least. But once he'd gathered all of it together, arranging the pieces just so, the slab of concrete sort of looked like a patio.

Just as he finished testing the chairs, the back door opened, and Hannibal emerged with cups of coffee. The spring morning was bright and fine, as was his little smile. “A lovely surprise.”

“Wanna give it a test run?”

Hannibal agreed and they sat under the old vinyl umbrella, now clean of cobwebs and mended with duct tape, sipping their coffee, gazing across the tangled back lawn at the tree line. “I’ve never been one to subscribe entirely to the popular cultural concept of love languages,” Hannibal said after a delicate sip of his dark brew. “But I think I’ve found yours.”

Will felt heat stain his face and he almost choked while swallowing. “Uhm…”

“Acts of service,” Hannibal said. “When you can’t express yourself in other ways.”

“I’m, uhm…”

“Two days ago, I said it would be nice to be able to comfortably eat and read outside when the weather was warm. And now.” Hannibal gestured to the habitable patio.

Will drank coffee so he would have a chance to think before speaking. “Yours is food,” he pointed out, an instinctive response to being vulnerable: flip it back on the other person. “Cooking for people.” *Cooking people.*

“Without a doubt.”

They lapsed into silence, watching a scarlet finch and his mate alight on the lounge next to them for a moment, cheeping before they flew away. Then, “What can I make you for breakfast, Will?”

Will looked over at Hannibal, snared suddenly by his soft, dark gaze. His response was acceptance of the offered love. “Pancakes.”

Stained Clothes

Chapter Summary

Hannibal tends to Will's wounds.

“Fuck!” Will cursed, pulling his hand away from where he’d just sliced it open on an old piece of metal siding. He’d been poking around the shed again, looking for something else to nail over the hole in the attic roof where the raccoons had gotten in. They were tenacious little bastards and had started trying to eat through the soft parts of the wood around the board he’d placed.

Blood welled up over the heel of his hand. Will pressed the hem of his plaid shirt over the wound and went back to the house.

Hannibal was in the kitchen in front of the ironing board, wearing one of Millie’s ‘70s pink, yellow, green, and puke brown floral aprons. He met Will immediately by the sink as he held his bleeding hand under a stream of water. “What happened?”

“I was moving things in the shed and caught myself on something. Don’t worry, Doctor, I had a tetanus shot two years ago.”

“Keep washing it out. I’ll be back in a moment.” Hannibal went upstairs and returned with his doctor’s bag. He took over entirely, wrapping Will’s hand in a clean towel and applying pressure to stop the bleeding, then guided him over to the table, encouraging him to sit while he held the towel tightly over the heel of Will’s hand. “Hold that for a moment.”

Will did so, watching as Hannibal opened his bag and readied a few items. He unwrapped a disinfecting wipe and had Will remove the towel. The bleeding had mostly stopped. The cut wasn’t too bad, considering how much it had bled initially. Will forgot the pain and barely felt the sting as Hannibal cleaned out the cut and carefully bandaged it up. He was transported back in time to the night he’d killed Randall Tier and Hannibal had cleaned up his split knuckles with the same caring reverence.

Back then, he’d wondered if he really was as special as Hannibal was clearly trying to make him feel. Hannibal had shaped Bedelia and Randall Tier and who knew how many others, putting them in chrysalises to emerge as killers. Will had honestly wondered if he’d really meant anything to Hannibal beyond being someone interesting to manipulate. But that question was gone now. It had slowly answered itself in the back of his mind and now he saw it like a lighted billboard on a dark stretch of highway.

“There. Good as new. Keep it clean. I’ll change the dressing again tonight before bed.” Hannibal got up and washed his hands, then packed up his bag. “You’ll recover. Not sure I

can say the same for your shirt."

Will got to his feet, looking down at himself. His button-down was badly stained. "I'll rinse it now and see what can be done." Hannibal held out his hand expectantly.

Will's face flamed hot. "You don't have to," he blurted. "I mean, uh… you don't have to do my laundry."

Hannibal smiled. "Will," he said, "I'm trying to speak your language."

Oh, right. Acts of service.

Will bit the inside of his lip and unbuttoned his shirt, sliding it off and dropping it into Hannibal's outstretched hand.

All at once his empathy pulse churned to life and Will translated the micro expressions he caught on Hannibal's face before he went to the sink to rinse the shirt. He'd been looking. *Looking* looking. At Will. Like *that*. Will's revelation was simultaneously overwhelming, terrifying, and flattering. As Hannibal turned away to scrub the shirt out in the sink, Will let himself *look* look in return at the way the apron hugged his waist. The unmistakable shape and curve of his backside. The hands and forearms Will had admired since that night he'd seen Hannibal wrist-deep in a guy's abdomen, saving his life from the bumbling kidney thief.

Was this a *thing*? Was that… what they shared, what they could share? Will's mind raced over the possibilities, his brain rolling downhill into vague soft-focus fantasies, flashing images of flesh joining, of mouths and hands and…

It was too much. Will practically fled out the back door. But then he stood in front of the kitchen window on the back patio and stretched. Pretended to adjust the umbrella. Then just stood with his hands on his bare hips as if gauging the weather.

When he finally turned back to the house, Hannibal was still at the kitchen sink. Staring. Gazing. Their eyes met, and held for a long moment before Hannibal broke the connection, lifting Will's shirt to squeeze it out in the sink.

(alternate) There's a _____ in the room!

Chapter Summary

The raccoons are colonizing the farm house.

Will slipped into wakefulness and felt pleasured excitement tingle along all of his nerves.

Hannibal was *holding him*. Will didn't know if Hannibal was asleep or awake, but there was no mistaking it. This wasn't an "oops I shifted in the night and now I'm touching you" moment. Will was being... cuddled. He could feel Hannibal's soft breath against the back of his ear and reveled in the firm grip of Hannibal's palm against his chest, arm curved around Will's midsection. Hannibal's sturdy thigh rested against the curve of his ass and the solidness of his chest butted up against Will's back.

It felt good. Maybe his love language was acts of service, but damn. This was heaven. This... felt right. He closed his eyes again to savor it. He wasn't gonna move until he absolutely had to.

Then, the comfortable silence was broken by a strange chittering noise. Loud.

Will sat up quickly, whipping his head around, looking for the source of the sound. Hannibal shifted with a soft groan as Will cautiously got out of bed. The chittering sounded again, coming from the small closet where Hannibal hung up his clothes. Rustling.

"Will?" Hannibal was sitting up now, rubbing his eyes.

"We, uhm... we got a critter in here somewhere," Will said.

Hannibal didn't react immediately. He ran his hand through his hair and then sat up, glancing around the room. "A critter of what species, do you think?"

"Mammal. I'm guessing raccoon." Will pointed to the closet.

"Getting a series of rabies shots would put us in danger of discovery," Hannibal said, getting out of bed and sliding his feet into his slippers. The nights had been getting warmer, and he was shirtless.

"Don't get bit. Good advice." Will pulled on a long-sleeved denim shirt from his dresser drawer and buttoned the cuffs for a little protection. "I'm gonna go grab some gloves. Try to keep track of it." Will left the bedroom quickly but quietly, latching the door behind him, then hurried downstairs for a thick pair of work gloves. Returning, he found Hannibal peering into the closet, the door cracked.

Will shut the bedroom door and handed Hannibal a laundry basket. "If it gets past me, see if you can trap it. Just be careful."

Hannibal nodded, taking the basket.

"Stand back," Will ordered. Then he used his bare foot to nudge the closet door open. He'd expected a raccoon, a big angry hissing thing, like the one he'd seen in the attic. But the creature perched on the shelf was just a baby with big dark eyes, its little furry body trembling. "Oh, shit," Will murmured softly. "Okay, hey, there, now, it's okay, it's okay..." He slowly leaned forward with his gloved hands, expecting the critter to leap right at his face any second. But the baby raccoon just froze in fear and let him capture it in his hands, holding it by the legs and the scruff of the neck. Once caught, it did struggle and hiss, but it was so small it was no trouble at all to handle.

Will backed up from the closet and Hannibal opened the bedroom door. Will walked the raccoon outside and out to the woods before setting it free. It cowered against the base of a tree, chittering. "The nest is probably in the attic," Will sighed, returning to Hannibal who stood on the patio, watching. "I need to get up there again and try to seal it up. No clue how it got down into the main part of the house."

They went inside. Will stripped off his gloves and washed his hands and undid the cuffs of the denim shirt that he was wearing with just his light blue boxers, barefoot. "Coffee? Guess we're up for the day."

Hannibal stepped closer to him as he rinsed out the coffee pot in the kitchen sink, their hips touching. "I thought," he said, "in those first moments of waking that you'd woken up and... were alarmed. That I was holding you in that manner."

Will set the pot in the sink and turned off the water. "No," he said. "N-no, no, I was... I was awake but I was... uhm, just lying there. Then I heard the raccoon. Little bastard," he said with a self-conscious laugh.

"You were comfortable?"

"Yes," Will confirmed. "I... didn't want to get out of bed." For a second, he thought about suggesting they go back to bed.

But Hannibal had turned and was scooping coffee into the filter. "I was comfortable, too," he said, giving Will a little smile.

Mistaken Identity

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will meet their neighbor, a lady named Trudi.

Hannibal had found the remains of a kitchen garden in the backyard. A few perennial herbs grew stubbornly through the grass: mint, tarragon, lavender. He'd set out that morning to clear off the grass and encourage their growth. Will was up in the attic, trying to figure out how the raccoons were getting in. Everything looked sealed up tight, or as tight as could be expected considering the age and neglect of the house. He found an old tin of baby powder and spread it evenly over the rough floorboards, hoping to catch tracks and see where their ingress was.

Will had just descended the attic stair-ladder to get a glass of iced tea when he heard a knock on the door. His first instinct was that the authorities had arrived. And with that instinct came the realization that he was more than willing to kill his brother officers if it meant Hannibal was safe. Will darted into the bedroom and retrieved his pistol from between the mattress and the box spring, then hurried down the stairs, pausing to glance at the frosted glass of the front door. A single shadow raised its hand to knock again.

Didn't look like a cop. Short, pear-shaped, poofy hair, but you never knew. Will crept down the stairs, thumbing off the safety, and opened the door a crack. "Yes?"

"Hi there!" The silhouette turned out to be a woman in a pink tee-shirt and bedazzled jeans, holding a covered casserole dish, a shopping bag dangling from her wrist. "I'm Trudi French! I live down the road a piece. Y'know, the blue house with a birdbath in the front?"

"Uh..." Will murmured, glancing around. She seemed to be alone, having driven up in a white Camry.

And suddenly, she was coming inside, handing him the covered Pyrex dish. Will stepped back instinctively as the lady bustled in, setting down the shopping bag on the front table, freeing up her hands to shake his.

Will set the gun on top of the casserole to complete the greeting, then winced as she released him. "I'm so sorry," he said, picking up the handgun and putting the safety back on, shoving it down the back of his pants. "I, uh, I didn't know who... you were..."

The lady laughed and patted him on the arm, picking up the shopping bag and inviting herself further in, crossing the living room and stepping into the kitchen to unpack whatever she'd brought. The sack was full of Tupperware containers filled with some kind of square-shaped food. Will set down the casserole dish on the counter as well. "Don't worry about your piece,

hon, I get it! I never leave the house without mine!" The woman lifted the hem of her bubblegum shirt and showed him a dainty holster with a hot pink Glock 9mm strapped to the waistband of her jeans. "I just wanted to say welcome to the neighborhood, even though I'm your only neighbor for twenty odd miles!" She uncovered the casserole dish. "Brought you a pan of my famous Western Iowa Cheddar Bacon Loaf and some scotcheroos. And no, you can't have the recipe, it's a secret!"

The back door squeaked as Hannibal pulled it open. He had his trowel in one hand, and with one glance, Will knew he was prepared to use it as a weapon. "Uh, this is Trudi." he said, quickly trying to diffuse the situation. "She lives down the road. She brought us..."

"Scotcheroos and bacon loaf!" Trudi said, holding out her hand for Hannibal to shake. "Welcome. It's so good to see people in this house. It's been ages!"

Hannibal eyed Will's gun that was sitting on the counter next to the food, then apparently chose to ignore it. "Trudi, a pleasure," he said. "This is Christopher, and I'm Boris."

"So nice to meet you guys! I used to come up here all the time when Bob and Millie lived here, trying to help out, y'know, when their kids weren't around to lend a hand. Lovely people, I miss them every day. It's been so lonely around these parts with nobody in this house, so I'm just over the moon that y'all are here. And just so you know, I support your lifestyle a hundred percent. My niece is a lesbian and all of that, so you don't have to worry about me, okay? Though you should be careful, there are some real rednecks around these parts."

Before Will could think too hard about her assumption, Hannibal shifted seamlessly into host mode, and suddenly Trudi was on the patio drinking iced tea and telling them all about her kids and her cats, her ducks and chickens and her dog Muffy. "Is it just you at home?" Hannibal wanted to know.

"Yes, my husband passed away about ten years ago," she said, breezing right by the question. "Anyway, you two have to come down and have some coffee sometime and I'll get you some duck eggs – you haven't had a fried egg until you've had a duck egg. They're so rich, and the yolk is the prettiest color!"

They promised to stop by soon for coffee and eggs and to watch some sporting event that Trudi promised came with the sports package she had through Direct TV. It was over an hour before she finally left, sent home with a handful of fresh mint from Hannibal's garden.

Will took a breath after her car disappeared down the gravel road. He looked at Hannibal, who smiled, a little smirk that opened wider as Will dissolved into laughter. They went back to the kitchen and Hannibal opened one of the containers, lifting out a piece of scotcheroo, whatever the hell that was. It looked like a Rice Krispy treat with hardened chocolate fudge on top. "I will if you will," he said, a childish dare.

Will chuckled and lifted a square. They tapped their bars together and each took a bite.

"Oh my God," Will said after he'd swallowed. "These are... *really good*."

"I have fewer hopes for the bacon loaf," Hannibal said.

Bathtub

Chapter Summary

Will soaks in the bath to help his old rotator cuff injury.

"Ow!" Will sucked in his breath, flinching away from whatever was causing him pain. He turned to Hannibal, who had come up behind Will where he sat at the patio table and put a hand on his shoulder, giving it what he'd probably thought was a gentle squeeze.

The look in Hannibal's eyes was pure, raw heartbreak. He stood there like a deer in the headlights, his hand frozen in midair.

"Sorry," Will apologized immediately. "Sorry, you just surprised me. You gotta start, uhm... walking louder."

"That wasn't a startle response. That was the result of pain."

Will stood up, rubbing his shoulder with the opposite hand, feeling along the groove of his shoulder blade. The whole area felt stiff and inflamed. "Yeah, your thumb, it hit something..."

"May I?" Hannibal requested.

Will turned around, trying to keep himself relaxed as Hannibal touched his shoulders, applying gentle pressure to various muscle groups. It felt clinical, his touch doctor-like, but barely concealing an undercurrent of something else entirely. Something much more tender.

Will hissed, flinching, when Hannibal pressed onto a spot just to the left of his rotator cuff. “May I see?” Hannibal requested.

Cheeks warm, Will unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off that shoulder. Hannibal traced his finger along the knife scar he'd earned in New Orleans. "You've aggravated your old injury. Probably hauling all those materials up and down from the attic."

"Shit," Will cursed. "I knew it was sore, but I didn't realize how bad it was."

"Come with me." Hannibal turned and walked out of the kitchen, headed upstairs. Will followed, buttoning his shirt back up. He found Hannibal in the bathroom, running hot water into the old clawfoot tub. From beneath the sink, he produced a bag of Epsom salts and poured a generous amount into the filling bath. "Submerge your shoulders as best you can and have a soak. We'll rotate the heat with ice."

"It's fine," Will argued faintly, but he was already unbuttoning his shirt again, knowing that Hannibal wasn't going to take no for an answer. Hannibal brought him some drinking water

and instructed Will to take ibuprofen and a muscle relaxer, then left, shutting the door.

Will did as the doctor ordered and lay in the tub with his legs propped up, trying to keep his shoulders underwater as much as possible. He stayed until the water had cooled off, then got out and toweled off. Already he could feel the tension in his shoulders and back melting away, and the muscle relaxant gave him a kind of sweet and easy peace.

He put his boxers back on, carrying the rest of his clothes with him back to the bedroom. Hannibal was there with a cup of tea and a tube of Bio Freeze. "It's expired, but might provide some relief," he explained. "And turmeric and ginger tea. Anti-inflammatory." He motioned Will over to the bed where he sat and patted the mattress next to him.

Will sat on the edge and picked up the cup of tea, taking a sip but not tasting it, his body vibrating with the anticipation of being touched again. Hannibal was very gentle as he applied the topical pain reliever, then began to gently massage the area around the old injury to ease the muscles that were likely trying to compensate for the weaker ones.

Will didn't realize he'd made a pleasured little sound until it was too late. It encouraged Hannibal's treatment, which in and of itself felt amazing. But it was the intimacy, the healing touch, that was bringing a wild bliss.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," Hannibal said. The words were resonant, heavy with meaning like the clappers of the bells of Notre Dame, the words echoing through the quiet little house and the empty chambers of Will's heart. Because Will sensed Hannibal didn't only mean *now*, at this moment, when he'd accidentally put his thumb over that sore spot in what was meant to be a gesture of affection. Hannibal was apologizing for all the times before, all of the pain he'd caused, all of the mental and physical injury.

Will turned slowly and Hannibal dropped his hands away. They locked eyes. "I'm sorry I hurt you, too," Will said, reaching out and picking up one of Hannibal's hands, tracing the pads of his first two fingers along the raised ridge of the scar on his wrist left by Matthew Brown.

This was it. Will could feel it. The moment. Right? Yes. Had to be.

No. Hannibal was getting to his feet. "I'll get the ice," he said, and in those four words, Will felt the empathy pulse slice across his mind.

Hannibal wasn't going to make the first move. He'd restricted Will's freedom too many times, coerced and manipulated. He'd vowed, it seemed, to give Will total autonomy.

If Will wanted something more to blossom between them, he was going to have to plant the seed and make it happen.

Volunteering

Chapter Summary

Will volunteers to make dinner.

Will brought his cleaned channel catfish up from the pond and into the kitchen, laying them out on the cutting board to carve them into filets. It was hot today, and the house didn't have central air. There were window units in the living room and the bedroom, but the kitchen had the tendency to get pretty warm. He lifted his baseball cap and wiped his forehead with his arm, finding a knife in the block to begin cutting the fish.

Will turned when he heard steps coming up behind him. Hannibal had taken Will’s comment to heart and was walking louder these days. He was as dressed down as Will had ever seen him, in athletic shorts and a sweat-wicking tank. Swimming in the pond, Will had told him, was not advisable considering the snapping turtles and agricultural runoff, so Hannibal had taken to running along the gravel roads for exercise.

Will saw his nostrils flare as he stepped closer. So, Will took a deep breath of his own with a little smirk.

"Did you just smell me?" Hannibal returned the amused smile.

"Difficult to avoid, I think, for either of us."

But that was the thing. Yeah, Will and Hannibal were both sweaty and by all accounts shouldn't smell good. But there was a silent olfactory understanding that the essence of their physical labor was mutually appreciated. Will felt a shiver go up his spine when Hannibal's tongue slipped out and touched his lower lip.

"You had success." Hannibal nodded to the fish on the counter, getting closer still, so they could stand hip-to-hip and look at the catch.

"Can I, uh... volunteer to make dinner tonight?" Will asked.

"Certainly."

"And you can't be in the kitchen while I do it," Will said. "I can't concentrate with you, uh, scrutinizing every little culinary decision, okay?"

"Never ask what's for dinner," Hannibal advised. "Spoils the surprise."

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Will set a plate on the table in front of Hannibal, then sat down after serving himself. Hannibal picked up his knife and fork and waited expectantly.

"Oh, right." Will cleared his throat. "Breaded baked catfish with peach, tomato, and cucumber salad."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow as if urging him to continue.

"Uh, *bon appetit*," Will finished with a little scoffed laugh.

They ate.

Will watched Hannibal's face intently, hoping to catch a micro-expression that would betray what he thought of the food. Hannibal sampled each part of the dish, then nodded, chewing. At last, he smiled. "This is excellent, Will."

"I wouldn't go so far as excellent, but, uhm, it's *edible*. Which is what I was going for. And hey, scotcheroos for dessert." Pause. "You really like it?"

"I do. Very much."

"And you're not just saying that? 'Cause you can tell me."

"There's nothing to tell, Will. Dinner is very good, thank you."

Will was not prepared for how warm and delighted the comment made him feel. He fixed his eyes on his plate instead, though he could tell Hannibal was looking at him from time to time, stealing affectionate little glances.

After finishing and clearing up, they took a walk down to the pond so Will could show Hannibal where he'd caught the fish. They had a scotcheroo each for the road. "I know you're better at cooking. Obviously. But I thought you might like a break," Will said.

"It's nice to be cooked for."

"I know," Will agreed. "You do it for me all the time."

"You were speaking *my* language tonight," Hannibal said, though he wasn't looking at Will, choosing instead to gaze out over the pond and the way the sunset reflected over it.

"Yeah, I was," Will agreed, looking at his feet, kicking a little rock over a clump of grass with his toe. Laundry. Cooking. Fixing things. Hannibal patiently cleaning the dust from everything in the house. Will getting the lawnmower started and keeping the grass trimmed. All of this could be seen as nothing but cooperative cohabitation. Household harmony.

But that's not what he wanted. "Maybe," Will suggested, just over the din of the singing insects. "We should, uhm... quit using those languages and just, ah... speak English."

Hannibal turned to him. "Is there something you want to say?"

"I think we got something to, uhm, s-say to... each other." A doubtful, panicked pause. "Don't we?"

Hannibal just looked at him. Will could feel his radiating hope, but he could tell Hannibal wasn't going to say it first. He was giving Will the power, his silence asking for consent and affirmation.

"I love you." Will blurted it out. It tumbled from between his lips almost without his permission, then came a rush of awkward words. "I don't know what that means. I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to–"

Hannibal silenced him by drawing Will into his arms. Holding him so tight Will couldn't draw a full breath, pulse hammering in his temples, pleasured anxiety thrumming through his nerves.

And then they were kissing. It was closed mouth at first, just pressure, and then it wasn't, and oh shit, Hannibal was a great kisser. Best he'd ever had, alternately tender and sweet and then deep and thrilling. Will realized somewhere off in the corner of his mind that the time he'd kissed Alana Bloom was no longer the best kiss of his life. That place of honor was obliterated by this moment in the fading light.

It felt like a great and beautiful relief, an Epsom salt bath for the soul. They seemed to both sense a fork in the road and paused, gazing at one another, blue to tawny maroon brown. "Eyes are distracting," Hannibal said softly, gathering Will's hands in his own. "You see too much; you don't see enough."

Will smiled, looking down at their hands folded together, giving a rueful shake of his head. "I don't think… I'd ever see too much of you."

"You want to see all of me?"

"And *know* you," Will confirmed.

"You won't look away when you see something that frightens you?"

"The only thing," Will said, "that frightens me now is… not having this." He squeezed Hannibal's hands, drawing their blended grip to his chest, and pressing it there, over his heart.

"I am nourished," Hannibal said, his voice low and husky, laden with longing, "by the very sight of you, Will."

"Then let's go inside and, ah… stare creepily at one another for the rest of the evening," Will suggested, unable to stop his humor coping mechanism from ruining the moment.

But Hannibal laughed, showing teeth. He so rarely did, his smiles closed-mouthed and mildly amused, like Mona Lisa's or Flora's from *Primavera*. The more open expression was precious to Will.

Hannibal leaned in and kissed him again, brushing his mouth with those princely, plush lips, so unique in shape and glorious in taste and texture. “I’m exceptionally well-versed in creepy staring,” he said, and it was Will’s turn to laugh loud enough to echo it across the pond.

They held hands on the walk back.

Crisis

Chapter Summary

The farm is in the path of a wrath-of-God tornado.

Waking up to the landline phone ringing was admittedly better than the chittering of a raccoon in the closet, but Will was still loath to leave the bed. "Who would be...?"

"I'll get it." Hannibal tossed off the sheet and stepped out into the hall where there was an old avocado green rotary phone on the wall. Will was sure to turn on his side to watch him go, admiring the twin rounds that filled out his black briefs. It was hot, and they'd been sleeping in their underwear. Not naked. Not yet, but it certainly seemed like they were headed that way. Last night had just been some over-the-clothes type of stuff, like they were teenagers about to be caught. Lots of kissing and cuddling, despite the air conditioner's pathetic attempts to cool the room.

He heard Hannibal answer the phone, speak quietly for a few moments, and return to the doorway. "Trudi. She says we ought to look at the weather."

The windows revealed that the sky was considerably darker than it should have been this time of morning. Will got out of bed and they went downstairs, despite the morning tent he was very obviously pitching. They stepped out onto the covered front porch, looking at the far-off horizon.

"Oh shit," Will said. The air was hot and sticky, the wind violent, shaking the trees. The sky had strips of gray-green threading across it, and a huge storm was obviously rolling in. "How do you feel about, ah, relocating to Oz?"

Hannibal chuckled. "It might be easier to hide from the authorities there."

"We'd have to be careful someone didn't drop a house on *us*," Will joked, though his heart was kicking up dust. The electricity and weight in the air was rather alarming.

"It's beautiful," Hannibal said, sliding his arm around Will's middle as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

"S'pose we should, uhm... take shelter?" Will suggested.

Hannibal turned to him with a benevolent smile. Reaching up, he ran his fingers through Will's hair. "It's especially unruly today," he said. "It must be the weather."

Will's eyes dropped closed just for a moment as he leaned into the touch. Ugh, he loved having his hair played with. And apparently Hannibal knew it.

The first grumbles of thunder churned out of the clouds as the wind picked up another notch, pelting Will's bare chest with dead leaves and bits of grass picked up from the yard. Lightning flashed, which seemed to spark life into Hannibal's eyes – not just life, but a kind of feral hunger. He closed his fingers on Will's curls with one hand, sliding his hand down to grip his ass, drawing him into a rough kiss and embrace, the storm spreading from the sky to the two of them.

The next thing Will knew, his back thudded against the side of the house. Hannibal trapped him there, devouring his mouth, then his neck. Will's heavy breaths and sighs were drowned out by the heavens as they opened, pouring down rain. Even on the covered porch, they were sprayed by the constant gusts of wind capturing the fat raindrops and blasting them against everything on the porch. "Fuck," Will rasped, an amorous curse.

Within moments they were both soaked, skin and hair dripping as the storm howled. And Hannibal was getting on his knees, yanking Will’s boxers down and freeing his cock. Opening his mouth and swallowing him down, gripping Will by the hips. Will put his hand in Hannibal's wild, wet hair, stroking and tugging in tandem, gasping out half-formed words of praise as Hannibal sucked and licked, going deeper and deeper. If he'd thought Hannibal was a good kisser, his oral skills were off the fucking charts. His orgasm built as the winds increased their fervor, thunder reverberating so loudly Will could feel it in his chest.

As Will came, he watched a grain bin on the horizon disintegrate as a funnel of cloud descended from the heavens. The roar was deafening, swallowing Will's cry the way Hannibal swallowed his emission – entirely. Panting, Will hauled Hannibal up and pulled him close. "We have to take shelter!" he shouted over the din.

They hurried inside and down the rickety cellar stairs, Will’s bare feet protesting the rough concrete floor. The dank little room showed off the limestone walls of the foundation, lit by a single overhead bulb. It was full of junk, of course, but most importantly, there was an old sofa with a broken arm down here, waiting in vain for someone to repair it. Will whipped off the dust sheet and pushed Hannibal down on the cushions, kissing him again, tasting the remains of himself.

The roar of the tornado sounded like a freight train bearing down on the little house. The old mason jars that lined the walls rattled and gravel pelted the siding. Just as Will pulled Hannibal’s rain-wet briefs off, at last getting a good look at his cock, the lights went out. The basement plunged into blackness, save the slivers of dirty green light from a few small windows installed in the foundation.

“If we’re gonna die,” Will said as Hannibal stroked his wet hair and tongued his throat, “we’re gonna die happy.”

“One cannot ask for more than that,” Hannibal said as Will groped his way down his chest, stroking his hair, before wrapping a hand around Hannibal’s erection. Will thought it would be weird, having another man’s dick in his hand, but he treated it the way he would his own and it seemed to garner results. Giving a blowjob was actually a lot easier than eating pussy, he found, and the way he was able to break Hannibal down, unravel him into a writhing mess, moaning in harmony with the storm outside, made him feel more than adept. He felt powerful.

So enraptured with the act, he was surprised when Hannibal came, shooting what felt like a huge load into his mouth. It caught Will off-guard, and he sputtered for a moment, wiping his mouth with his hand. “Shit, sorry,” he said, and realized he could hear himself better now. The freight-train roar of the storm had quieted a bit. Maybe they weren’t going to die after all.

Hannibal shook his head with an exhaustively joyful smile. “No, no, Will, don’t… apologize… that was *perfect*.”

“We oughta have a tornado more often,” Will said as Hannibal pulled him close, urging Will to spread out on top of him, all skin on skin, cool and fresh from the rain.

“Someplace where there isn’t any trouble,” Hannibal mused, stroking Will’s back and the soft place at the base of his hairline. “Over the rainbow.”

Taking Turns

Chapter Summary

Will is trying to be equitable with the blowjob distribution in the household.

"No, no, no," Will said as Hannibal slid on top of him and deposited a series of little kisses from his neck down to his navel. "No, it's my turn - hey!"

Hannibal looked up at him from between Will's legs where he already had Will's cock in his hand, ready to slip it in his mouth again. He pursed his proud lips, tilting his head.

"Are you *pouting* because you don't get to suck me off *first*?" Will demanded, then arched his back and sucked in a deep, sharp breath as Hannibal's tongue darted out and licked the underside of the head and up into the slit.

"You're the perfect taste for first thing in the morning."

"But you've given me – you're, what, three ahead of me now?" Will counted then gasped in another breath as Hannibal teased him with his tongue again.

"I can't help it. I'm powerless." Hannibal shook his head as if he was sorry, which he so clearly wasn't.

"Han-!" Will's protest turned into a velvet moan as Hannibal opened up and drew him in all the way. "Goddamn it-! I'm-I'm trying..."

"Trying to what?" Hannibal asked, lifting Will’s twitching cock out of the way to lick his balls, sucking one against his lips.

"Be fair!" Will gasped out. "Not be a-a-a bad, uhm... oh fuck-" He dug his hands into the pillow behind his head and the sheets at his side.

Hannibal worked busily until Will was close, his thighs tensing, then stopped. Will whimpered as Hannibal massaged with his hand instead, but with maddening slowness and not enough pressure. "Your willingness to reciprocate is noted and appreciated. However, I've been waiting to taste you for a very long time, and now that I'm allowed, I'm afraid I've developed an obsession. An addiction."

"Emphasis on the *dick*," Will said through a grin. "But seriously... it's not because I'm... no good at it or something...? I told you I don't have, ah... experience."

Hannibal looked almost offended. "Will, your generosity and enthusiasm are legendary. And you are gifted. Some are born with natural talent. I suspected as much when I shoved a

plastic tube in your throat. You took to it very well."

"You...!" Before Will could ask any questions, Hannibal was back at it, and the edging made his climax even more powerful. It was heaven, starting the day like this on these spring mornings, satisfied and sweaty and in love.

Hannibal pulled Will into his arms, kissing his temple. "Now, you may have your turn," he said with a cat-that-got-the-canary smirk.

"You little shit," Will said, though lovingly.

Parade

Chapter Summary

Trudi's niece is the Beef Queen!

“Nice,” Will complimented as he passed behind Hannibal’s patio chair on his way to check the raccoon traps. Hannibal was knitting away, the scarf getting longer and longer as he perfected his knitting skills.

“It seems strange to be making this as the weather warms,” Hannibal said.

Will chuckled, leaning over, and resting his hand on Hannibal’s shoulders, planting a kiss on his cheek. “That’s the thing about seasons, though. They’re bound to change. And you’ll be ready.”

They both turned as the crutch of gravel alerted them to someone driving up to the house. Hannibal finished his knitting row and stopped, holding the bare needle. Will picked up a nearby gardening hoe and they went around front to see who it was.

Luckily, it was just Trudi, who flew out of her Camry with a big smile on her face. She jogged up to them and suddenly Will was crushed against her in a big hug as she squealed and laughed in delight. Then, apparently, it was Hannibal’s turn to be manhandled into a bear hug.

“You’ll never believe it!” Trudy cried after releasing them both. “My niece Braxleigh is the *Beef Queen!*”

Will realized he had no idea what half of those words meant. “Come in for a coffee and tell us all about it,” Hannibal suggested. Trudi was more than happy to do so, planting herself at the kitchen table with one of Millie’s mugs that said “#1 Grandma.” Will went outside to rescue Hannibal’s knitting things and put the hoe away. When he came back, Trudi was explaining the intricate process that young women of the local towns must undergo to even be nominated for the honorable title of “Beef Queen.”

“She had to write an essay and get all these letters of recommendation, plus her hours of community service…” On and on Trudi went, talking about Braxleigh being a co-captain of the volleyball team and how far she’d made it in 4H at the fair.

Will managed to slip off, muttering something about the raccoon traps. When he came back, Trudi was *still* talking. “Well, I had a feeling she was going to win it because when she was 7, I shit you not, she beat out 20 other kids from the tri-county area to be Little Miss Porkchop.”

She handed Hannibal her phone so he could see a picture, presumably of Braxleigh as Little Miss Porkchop.

“How charming.”

Will leaned back against the counter, sipping his coffee, watching his partner, the murderous cannibal, listen intently to a woman in a pink Snoopy tee shirt talk about meat-themed beauty pageants with the patience of a saint. But that was Hannibal. He had a unique way of making people feel special. Sometimes, Will knew it was manipulation, deploying it when he wanted the person’s trust. But Will thought that Hannibal did in fact find the human race to be utterly fascinating, from the grandest life to the most mundane. And Will thought that was… cute?

“Chris,” Trudi addressed him. “Hey, I left Muffy in the car. Can you let her out? I didn’t think I’d be yapping so much but I’m just so excited. Get this, she gets to ride on top of the giant hamburger float in the parade!”

Will went out to Trudi’s car and opened the back driver’s side door. Muffy, a little black mutt with curly fur poked her head out. She was nervous, not knowing him, but eventually he coaxed her out for a pee, then around back to the patio, where he gave her some sliced turkey with Trudi’s permission. Before long he was stretched out on the lounge with the dog on his lap. Will hadn’t realized how much he missed having a dog until that moment, feeling her comforting weight on his legs, listening to her sloppy little doggy snores.

At last, Trudi and Hannibal emerged from the house. “I didn’t know you were a knitter!” she was saying. “I’ll bring my crochet over next time and we’ll have ourselves a little stitch and bitch. Oh my, look at you, Muffy! Wow, she’s usually so shy! She’s a rescue. She was abused so she really has a hard time trusting people.”

“Christopher is the epitome of a dog person,” Hannibal said, eyes twinkling a bit as Will gently set the dog down. She licked his hand before bouncing off toward the car.

“See you soon, guys! You should come to the parade!” With the crunch of gravel and some dust, and two enthusiastic horn honks, Trudi was gone.

Will took a breath as the serenity of the evening descended again. “Nice dog,” he said.

“Trudi may have murdered her husband,” Hannibal replied.

“WHAT?”

Hannibal smiled, slipping his arms around Will, and kissing him gently. “Just our kind of neighbor.”

Junk Mail

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal hear from their document forger. Soon, they'll have to move on.

It was a dim, rainy morning, and while they'd tried to keep a schedule, to remain in shape and sharp and ready to run, today they stayed in bed, slipping in and out of dozing and snuggling, murmuring a few words of conversation. It was almost nine before the caresses and lingering kisses grew more focused and insistent. Will was up on his elbow, lips on Hannibal's, sleepily groping between his legs over the sheet.

"When did you have your first sexual thoughts about a man?" Hannibal asked when Will disengaged to kiss his neck.

"Don't use your therapy voice," Will warned, slipping his hand under the sheet.

"Apologies. Unintentional…" Hannibal tipped his head back, breathing deeply as he responded to Will's touches.

"What do you want me to say? That you're the first? That you, ah… converted me?" Will kissed beneath Hannibal's navel, noting with some satisfaction the little tummy that domestic life was only increasing in size.

"I want you to say that if it's true," Hannibal said.

Will scoffed a soft laugh. "Fine. Yeah… that's the truth. Though I remember having some very confusing thoughts in junior high when I went through my Greek Mythology phase."

"Achilles and Patroclus?"

Will nodded, looking up at him. "And this picture in a book I found of Zephyrus and Hyacinth."

"I know just the one. The winged west wind enjoying intercrural sex in midair with his lover."

"Yeah. I, uh… looked at that picture… a lot," Will admitted.

Hannibal eased Will back and got on his knees. "I can't fly, but perhaps…"

Will blushed even as he smiled and pulled Hannibal close. "13-year-old me would not have seen this coming…"

Hannibal slid his cock between Will's thighs, and Will's rested between them. Being face to face was delightful. Even if they weren't flying, Will felt himself soaring as Hannibal began to thrust into the warm space created by the crease of Will's legs, angling his hips so that Will's cock rubbed against his stomach with each stroke. They kissed, caressed hair and necks and cheeks, locked eyes.

"It seems… impossible… that you ever found eyes distracting…"

"Your eyes are a fucking distraction," Will smirked as he felt his core grow taut, his pleasure reaching its apex. "The best distraction…!"

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Later, they did make it out of bed. Hannibal was knitting on the couch when Will came back from the mailbox with the junk mail that still came for the deceased former tenants. He was about to toss it all in the trash when a nondescript white envelope caught his eye. It was addressed to Boris Jakov.

"I think this is for you."

Will handed it to Hannibal and he slipped it open. Inside was a postcard from Las Vegas. All it said was WISH YOU WERE HERE.

"Our passports are nearly finished," Hannibal said. "This is a message from my document forger. Soon, we'll receive instructions on how to pick them up."

"And then it'll be time to go." Will sighed, sinking down on the couch, and pulling Hannibal's legs over his lap. "Is it weird that I sort of… don't want to leave?"

"I feel the same."

"This house," Will mused, "feels like *our* house."

"Like our *home*," Hannibal corrected gently, the words weighty, even as he stitched and stitched. It reminded Will of the Fates, spinning the lives of mortals. Over and over, Hannibal's needles clicked and flashed, weaving the strands of his life together with Will's to create something comforting and warm, something to fight against the cold that would inevitably return.

"I love you," Will said suddenly.

Hannibal paused his knitting, keeping a finger on the end of the needle to prevent his yarn from slipping off. "And I love you," he said, leaning in for a kiss, closed-mouthed and innocent. "It's all right, Will," he added. "We turned this house into a home, despite its condition and the shadows of its former tenants."

Will laughed gently, smiling with teeth, stroking Hannibal's leg, teasing up the hem of his linen pants to caress his bare ankle. "Even if we have to hide out in a cave somewhere, we'll find a way to make it a home?"

"Certainly." Click-clack went the needles.

"Let's be real. You wouldn't survive in a cave," Will teased him.

"Of course, I would. Should I have need of anything, you'd build it for me."

"Even, ah… a harpsichord?"

"Yes. Made with sticks and vines and animal bones. I'd find a way to play it."

Will kissed him again. "I'm sure you would."

Sleeping Patterns

Chapter Summary

Will has been sneaking downstairs in the night to eat Oreo fluff.

Will shook himself out of the dream and opened his eyes. He was grateful, as he always was, to be in the little bedroom of the farmhouse, in the bed he shared with Hannibal. Grateful to realize what he'd just experienced wasn't real.

He turned on his side, as he always did when he woke, to simply look at Hannibal. But unlike all the other nights, this time the bed was empty. Will waited a minute to see if he would come back from the bathroom, but the house was very quiet, no sound of water running. A strange, irrational panic surged through him – had Hannibal left him, silently, in the night, with no explanation? Were the feds here, the SWAT team surrounding the house, Hannibal already subdued?

Will got out of bed and slipped downstairs. There was a light on in the kitchen. To his great relief, he found Hannibal sitting at the kitchen table in his robe, a Tupperware container and two bowls with spoons sitting in front of him.

"What are you doing up?" Will asked, rubbing the backs of his arms, despite how stuffy the house was.

"Waiting for you," Hannibal said simply.

"How did you know…"

"You've been waking up around this time for the past six nights," Hannibal said. "And I'm afraid I've caught on to your little scheme." He motioned to the Tupperware container.

"Scheme?" Will asked.

"You've been sneaking down here and eating this… concoction. This unholy wedding of ingredients." Hannibal popped the top off of the Tupperware, revealing a drastically reduced supply of Trudi's "famous" Oreo fluff. Where once there was a vast sea of speckled goop was now a tiny wedge at the bottom of the container.

Will opened his mouth like maybe he could explain or deny it, but then he just sat down at the table and scooped half of the remaining fluff into one is the bowls, then served Hannibal the other half.

Will started eating, but he was watching Hannibal, who dipped in his spoon and considered the mess of crushed up Oreos, pudding, and Cool Whip.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Will said, “but this is one of the best things I have ever eaten in my life.”

Hannibal took a less-than-certain bite. “It’s not as horrific as I imagined.”

“Says the guy who made fish jello,” Will said wryly.

Despite Hannibal’s misgivings, they polished off the Oreo fluff. Hannibal took the dishes to the sink, then turned to him, leaning his hips on the counter, and crossing his arms. “Your nighttime wanderings. The siren song of Oreo fluff? Or are you waking up for other reasons?” While Will was formulating his answer, he said, “Am I keeping you awake? Stealing the blankets?”

“It’s too hot for blankets.”

Hannibal looked at him expectantly. Will sighed. “I’ve been having bad dreams. Not like the ones I had with the encephalitis,” he was quick to point out. “But… bad. Dreams about Jack finding us. Dreams where I can’t protect you. They drag us off to different prisons and I realize that I’m never going to see you again.”

“You didn’t tell me,” Hannibal said softly. “Six nights. You shared your concerns and fears with a culinary abomination.”

“And not with you,” Will murmured.

“And not with me,” Hannibal said.

“I’m sorry.”

“Will.” Hannibal reached for him. Will got up and took his offered hands. “I’m not looking for an apology. Just your confidence.”

“I’m scared,” Will blurted. “And-and I’m ashamed of being scared.” Hannibal pulled him close in response. “Bob Dylan once said that when you got nothin’ you got nothin’ to lose and I’m just feeling like I, uh…I have a lot to lose all of the sudden.”

“I can’t promise you that nothing bad will happen,” Hannibal said into Will’s neck. “I wish I could.”

“I know.”

They went back to bed, holding each other in the dark. Hannibal kissed him gently, then with more insistence. “You taste like cookies,” he said.

Will chuckled. “Yeah?”

“You’re delicious.”

Marked Date on a Calendar

Chapter Summary

It's Will and Hannibal's one-week anniversary...

Will woke up to Hannibal stroking his hair back from his forehead and kissing it, gentle little presses of his lips against his clammy skin. “I’m okay,” Will mumbled. He’d been dreaming, but it wasn’t a nightmare so much as an anxiety dream.

His mind had been running him through a kind of obstacle course, giving him visions of packing up to leave the farmhouse. But they’d been frantic, throwing things into bags. Will had been frenzied, unable to find anything he really needed, knowing he was running out of time.

But Hannibal hadn’t woken him up because he’d been tossing and turning or moaning in his sleep, wanting to save him from a nightmare. That much was apparent when he slid on top of Will and kissed his neck. Will supposed it was no surprise that an expert in human behavior would catch on quick that Will’s neck was one of his erogenous zones. His throat was like a light switch and it didn’t take much to flip it and wake him up entirely. Every part of him.

Hannibal was attentive and simultaneously needy, kissing, flicking his tongue along Will’s clavicle, edging it with his teeth, hands groping Will’s body desperately. He slid Will’s boxers off and went after his cock and his crevice in tandem. “Fuck—!” The curse was really praise and was uttered halfway between a growl and a whine. Hannibal crawled up enough to press himself against Will’s spit-wet length and rut until he came, then finished Will off with his greedy mouth.

The house and the surrounding fields were dark and quiet now, their breaths barely audible under the struggling window air conditioner. Hannibal got out of bed, probably to clean up. Will drifted, considering going back to sleep. Hannibal returned a short time later and handed him a damp washcloth. As Will sat up to clean off his stomach, a heavenly floral aroma filled his nose.

Hannibal was standing next to Will’s side of the bed, his naked silhouette backlit by the weak moonlight that made it through the plastic blinds. He was adjusting something on Will’s nightstand. Will rolled over to Hannibal’s side and switched on the bedside lamp. “What are you doing?” he muttered sleepily. Hannibal stepped away from the nightstand and sank back onto the bed next to him, revealing a large bouquet of dark purple, lavender, and white lilacs. They were most certainly donated from Trudi’s yard – she had a whole line of the bushes in various colors along one side of her patio. “For me?” Will said with a little smile.

“For you.” Hannibal kissed him and shifted fully back into bed. “It’s been a week since you told me you loved me.”

Will chuckled, lying back so Hannibal could rest his head on Will’s shoulder and stroke his chest. “Six days,” he corrected.

“One week,” Hannibal argued.

Will checked the glowing clock on his dresser. 12:38 am. “Did you… wake me up at midnight to celebrate… our one-week anniversary?”

Hannibal just hummed, stroking the soft skin beneath Will’s navel.

“You’re something else,” Will sighed, but he was caressing Hannibal’s back with his fingertips and smiling as he said it. “Goodnight.”

Hannibal rolled off him to adjust his pillow. “Goodnight, Will.”

“Love you.”

Hand over his heart. “And I love you.”

Will drifted off, surrounded by Hannibal’s scent and the wafting lilacs.

Discount at a Favorite Store

Chapter Summary

The legendary showdown:

HANNIBAL LECTER
VS.
A BREADED PORK TENDERLOIN SANDWICH

The parking lot of the Amish grocery store was busier than Will had ever seen it. The fact that everyone drove an SUV, or a big ass truck did not help the situation, as people sometimes took up two spots because someone else further down the row had parked crooked, inviting door dings. Will had to park on the grass next to the lot itself, and he wasn't the only one.

Crowds made them wary, but supplies were running low, and Hannibal's morale really did seem to hinge on his ability to cook for Will. The last thing they needed was a sulky cannibal. Will put on his baseball cap and tried not to look at anyone as they headed for the entrance.

Another anomaly: there was a food truck parked on the other end of the lot on the highway side, accompanied by a ragged string of people waiting in line. The air reeked of grease and Will hated to admit it, but it smelled... *awesome*.

They went in and did their shopping. As they were checking out, the bonneted girl behind the cash register gave them a ticket printed on orange copy paper. *FREE TENDERLOIN WITH 50$ PURCHASE*! it read. "You can get your tenderloin at the truck outside," she suggested as they loaded up their cart to take back to the truck.

"Thanks," Will said, slipping the coupon in his pocket. Back at the truck, they loaded up the groceries, but as Hannibal went to open the cab door, Will just smiled, and walked away. Toward the food truck.

Hannibal caught up with him, a hand on his arm. "No reason to spend more time in public than necessary."

"Yeah, but... free tenderloin."

"To go, perhaps?"

"No, to eat right there." Will pointed at the card tables that had been set up on the grass for people to use. Most folks had taken their food to go in big Styrofoam containers, so the dining area, such as it was, wasn't busy. Just a couple older folks in Vietnam veteran hats at one table, and a family with a bunch of kids with runny noses horsing around while their

parents tried to wolf down their food. Hannibal took a seat and Will waited in line to present his coupon.

He returned with a grin and a paper platter bearing an enormous breaded and fried pork tenderloin, the patty dwarfing the cheap white-bread bun. It was smeared with ketchup and mustard, and sprinkled with red onion slices, shredded iceberg lettuce, tomato slices, and pickles. He set it down in front of Hannibal who eyed it with the same disdain as he'd looked at Trudi's Oreo fluff. "I'm interested to see how you plan to eat that, exactly," he said. There was no silverware provided.

"How *we're* going to eat it," Will corrected him.

Hannibal smiled benevolently. "I wouldn't want to deprive you of a moment of enjoyment."

"No, n-no, no, no… the enjoyment for me is watching *you* figure out how to eat this *elegantly*," Will said, sitting back and crossing his arms. “Good luck, ‘cause you’re gonna need it.”

Hannibal stared down at the plate, and Will could swear he was a little intimidated. "Is there a... common strategy?"

"Figure it out," Will challenged. "I know you're, ah, good at putting meat in your mouth in a variety of contexts, but I'm... curious to see what will happen."

"Very well." Hannibal lifted the sandwich in an awkward two-handed hold and started eating around the edge, trimming the patty down to the bun. It was impossible to do so with any kind of dignity. Some of the toppings slid off and there was grease, ketchup, and mustard on his hands in seconds.

"How is it?" Will asked with a grin he couldn't suppress.

"It's a fried meat patty," Hannibal said.

"You got a little..." Will pointed to his own chin.

"Did those heathens give you napkins, at least?"

Will handed him a cheap one-ply napkin like the ones given to children with their school lunches. Hannibal quickly exhausted its capabilities.

Will took pity on him. "All right, my turn." Transferring ownership of the tenderloin was not an easy task and made a bigger mess. Will was laughing at himself as he tried to eat in a way that wasn't completely abhorrent, and he caught Hannibal laughing with him, showing teeth, which he rarely did. "Does this, ah... turn you on?" Will asked after dripping mustard down his chin and blotting it with the unhelpful napkin.

"Tremendously."

Together, they managed to consume the tenderloin, though they were forced to go back into the grocery store and buy a package of baby wipes to clean themselves up properly.

When they got home, Will was about to make a joke about a different kind of “tender loins” when he saw Hannibal sink onto the couch with a look of mild discomfort on his face. "Uh oh," Will said. "Tummy ache?"

"My system is not used to... whatever that was."

Will patted his shoulder and gave him an affectionate squeeze. "I'll make you a ginger tea."

When he came back, Hannibal was half asleep, just like that, laying on his side on the sofa. Will set the tea next to him and smoothed his hair back from his forehead. "The fearsome Chesapeake Ripper... felled by a giant Iowa pork tenderloin sandwich," he murmured lovingly.

"I'll get you for this," Hannibal mumbled in response.

Police at the Door

Chapter Summary

I smell bacon.

The knock at the door sounded *official*. Will got up from bed immediately and peeked out the curtains, the acrid taste of fear climbing up the back of his throat. "County Sheriff," he said.

Hannibal was up in a split second, pulling on drawstring pants. Will yanked on his boxers and tee-shirt and opened the bedside drawer for his gun. "I'll go around back," he said as Hannibal slipped his folding knife into the pocket of his pajama pants.

"I love you," Hannibal said and they kissed briefly before parting.

Will scanned the backyard through the kitchen windows, then eased open the back door. He edged around the side of the house where he could see the cruiser parked on their gravel drive, lingering by the bushes that bordered the front porch. Over the boughs he could make out see a white cowboy hat.

Hannibal answered the door. "Good morning," he said pleasantly. It gave Will a little shiver, hearing his voice sound so smoothly benign, knowing what Hannibal was capable of. It gave him a little thrill that raced down to his cock. He shook his head, trying to stay focused. *Not now!*

"Good morning, sir, my name is Deputy Nost with the Adams County Sheriff's office. I was hoping to get a moment of your time today."

"Certainly," Hannibal said. "How can I help you?"

"I was curious who lived here now that Gary sold the place," the deputy said in a tone of maddening professional friendliness. "Is it just you, sir?"

"No, my partner lives here also." Will could imagine that Hannibal was holding a hand out now. "Boris Jakov."

"Nice to meetcha, Boris – hey, where you from?"

"Denmark," Hannibal lied. Will figured this deputy probably hadn't had the chance to study a wide variety of European accents. Hannibal had likely assumed the same.

"And what brought you to Iowa of all places?"

"Peace and quiet," Hannibal told him. "I used to have a very demanding job. Insurance adjuster."

"Oh, yeah, I get it. Well, mister–"

"Please," Hannibal said warmly, "call me Boris."

"Well, Boris, I'm actually here to ask you a few questions about a neighbor of yours, Trudi Meyer. Is now a good time?"

"As long as you don't mind my state of undress," Hannibal said. "Christopher and I were just getting up for the day."

"Sorry to wake you," the deputy said. "Is Christopher home? I'd like to talk to both of you."

"Yes, he's just in the kitchen."

That was his cue. Will snuck quickly back around the side of the house and stepped quietly through the kitchen door, stashing the gun in the apron drawer. When Hannibal and the deputy entered, they found him filling up the coffee pot. "Oh, hey," he said, feigning embarrassment. "I feel... compelled to, ah... cover myself."

"Don't worry about it, we're all guys here." The deputy was surprisingly well-built – he could prove difficult to subdue if they needed to resort to violence. The lawman removed his cowboy hat and set it on the kitchen table, then took the seat offered to him.

"Deputy Nost is here to ask us about Trudi," Hannibal said, taking a seat as well while Will continued filling the coffee pot.

"Trudi?" Will blinked, furrowing his brow. "What about her?"

"Have the two of you gotten to know her at all?" the deputy wanted to know.

"A bit," Will said, flipping on the switch on the coffee maker. It hissed and sucked in water noisily. The sound grated on Will's ears as he felt his nerves shredding one at a time like a string cheese.

"She's a generous neighbor," Hannibal said. "Often brings us baked goods."

Will crossed his arms, leaning back against the kitchen counter. This was a good angle if he should have to get the gun. "What's this about?" he asked.

"Just a routine check-in," the deputy said. "Has she ever mentioned her husband Dick Meyer to either of you?"

"She said that he passed away," Hannibal reported. "I thought it rude to discuss further, lest it bring up sad memories."

"And that's the only time she mentioned him?" Deputy Nost pulled out a notebook and scribbled something.

"Here and there," Hannibal said. "Recalling things when she's reminded of him. She said they honeymooned in Hawaii."

"Did she tell you how Dick died?"

"I think it was a... drowning?" Will recalled. He and Hannibal knew perfectly well what happened, but it was best to play dumb and see what the deputy would reveal.

"He fell out of his boat near the Ashcliffe Dam and was sucked under by river currents," the deputy said.

“You gotta be careful around dams,” Will said wisely as the coffee pot behind him sputtered out brown liquid into the carafe. “Even little ones. I lost a fishing buddy that way. People just don’t understand how dangerous they are.”

“How unfortunate. But I suppose a lot of accidents like that happen," Hannibal reasoned.

"Of course," the deputy soothed. "Trudi was the only witness, so we just like to verify from time to time that what she says happened... happened."

"Why would you think otherwise?" Hannibal asked innocently.

"The medical examiner won't let us close this case yet," the deputy explained. "Some things came up during the autopsy that he just won't let go, so every year I gotta go around and question people again." He shrugged like it was an unnecessary burden and the ME was a fussy prick. Will's empathy pulse swung over his vision. He glanced at Hannibal and knew instinctively that he'd perceived the same thing. The deputy was *lying*. He was still investigating because he thought there was something to investigate.

Trudi was in trouble.

"Well, thanks for indulging me." Deputy Nost handed Hannibal his card. "Please call me if you think of anything. I'm sure it's nothing, but like I said, the case is still open, and the sheriff says I have to keep working it." He got to his feet and put his cowboy hat back on. "Sorry to interrupt your morning."

“Are you sure you don’t want a quick cup of coffee before you go?” Will suggested.

“I’m a Monster man,” he said, holding up his hands with a self-deprecating grin, calculated, of course. “Wish I liked coffee, it’d be a hell of a lot cheaper than those damn energy drinks.”

"A pleasure to meet you. Stop back any time," Hannibal said as he walked the deputy to the door.

They watched as the cruiser turned around in their drive and headed back for the main road.

"Do we need to run?" Will asked softly.

"I don't think so," Hannibal said. "But Trudi might."

Will considered the situation. While he tried to get his thoughts in order, Hannibal folded him into an embrace.

"Why do you think she did it?" he asked as Hannibal gently kissed the side of his neck.

Hannibal pulled back to look at him, hand on his cheek. "Because he was always the antagonist in her life. Her nemesis. Once she realized it, she felt it was too late. Children, house, mortgage..."

"She was trapped...?"

Hannibal nodded.

"Did he abuse her?"

Hannibal shrugged. "Uncertain. I don't think so. All that matters is that she freed herself and made a new life."

"Sounds familiar," Will said. Then, "We have to protect her."

"We will," Hannibal promised, kissing his forehead.

In the Nearby Park

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is jealous of Will's admiration for a turkey.

“There he goes,” Will said, peering through the binoculars, “off to shoot his shot.”

He handed Hannibal the binoculars and pointed to where the Tom turkey was strutting out of the woods into the abandoned pasture, puffing himself up, waddling self-importantly toward a group of hens.

“Best of luck,” Hannibal said as he adjusted the lenses a bit.

“I don’t think anybody’s hunting this land,” Will said. They’d gone for a “hike” at the state nature park and slipped off the reserve to explore what appeared to be an abandoned homestead with a dilapidated house and rotting outbuildings. They had plans to make and needed to scout locations.

Hannibal handed Will back the binoculars. “Otherwise, someone would have shot their shot by now, quite literally,” he reasoned.

“Exactly,” Will said. “I mean, look at the beard on him.”

He heard Hannibal huff out a nearly inaudible “Humph.”

Will lowered the binoculars slowly. “You… don’t like me admiring… a *turkey*...?”

Hannibal could hardly keep a straight face, but gave a valiant effort, it seemed, for the sake of humor. “What does he have that I don’t?” he asked, slipping Will into his arms.

Will let the binoculars’ strap slide through his fingers, easing it to the ground so he could rest his hands on Hannibal's shoulders before linking his fingers around the back of his neck. “Such a… huge fan of feathers,” Will said, struggling to sound serious. “Gorgeous.”

“Do you think *I* should grow a beard?” Hannibal asked just as Will leaned in to kiss him. Will’s snorted laughter startled the turkeys, and they scurried for cover.

“Oh great, thanks a lot,” Will said. “Now I’ll never have a chance with him.”

Hannibal gripped him tightly and pressed his back against the tree they were lingering beneath, kissing his lips, then his neck. “I suppose I’ll have to improve my mating display in order to compete for your affections.”

“I guess so,” Will confirmed. Hannibal dropped to his knees and Will had to admit, a blowjob was better than a fan of tail feathers.

Later, as they walked back to the truck, Will glanced at Hannibal sidelong, trying to imagine him with a beard. Some possibilities came to mind. “You could, you know,” Will said as he got behind the wheel. “I mean, we’re on the run or whatever. Growing a beard for a disguise or something.”

“Alas, the police have already seen me clean shaven,” Hannibal said, touching his face briefly.

Will was driving, but that didn’t stop him from jealously wishing that was his hand instead. “Well, it still couldn’t hurt.”

Hannibal was smirking, he could tell, spying it in his periphery as he navigated the gravel roads. “Will, not twenty minutes ago I fell on my knees to give you fellatio in the woods. I believe that, among other things, earns me a measure of your honesty.”

Will chuckled. “Jesus Christ, Hannibal, just say *blowjob*, or you sucked my cock.”

“Not twenty minutes ago, I fell to my knees to suck your cock–”

“Okay, a-all right,” Will acquiesced. “Honesty. Yeah. I *want* you to grow a beard because I think it would look… good.” He paused. “S-sexy,” he said, feeling like that wasn’t the right word and absolutely was at the same time.

“Thank you,” Hannibal said, crossing his legs primly. “I’ll take it under advisement.”

Handmade Gift

Chapter Summary

Hannibal finishes his first scarf.

Hannibal paused knitting to scratch his stubble.

“You forgot how itchy it is when it’s growing out, didn’t you?” Will said from the other end of the couch where he was reading.

“I did,” Hannibal admitted.

A few more minutes of serene quiet, the only sound the click of the needles. Will absently touched his own face with the side of his knuckle.

“Did you forget how smooth it feels?” Hannibal teased.

“Maybe,” Will chuckled. “Though I still think I got the short end of the stick.”

“How so?”

Will slipped his bookmark into one of Bob’s dog-eared westerns. “You got instant gratification when I shaved. I have to wait for your beard to grow in.”

“I am a creature of gratification,” Hannibal said, clacking his knitting needles. “Surely you know that by now.”

“Don’t call me Shirley.”

Hannibal paused and looked at him, then chuckled, shaking his head. Will prodded his midsection with his bare foot in retaliation.

“You really like it?” Will ran his hand over his smooth cheek again.

“Don’t you?”

“I always felt like I had this, ah… terminal case of babyface,” Will told him. “Once I could actually grow a decent beard, I never wanted to shave it off.”

“You wanted to be taken seriously.”

“‘Spose so.”

Hannibal hummed, looping yarn between his fingers, eyes on his work. “You didn’t want to be perceived as feminine.”

Will chuckled. “I think I just, ah… walked right into a therapy trap, didn’t I?”

Hannibal’s eyes glimmered with humor as he glanced up from his work. “We’re just having conversations.”

Will considered. “I think I believe you this time. Though I don’t expect you to be able to turn off your analytical mind like a light switch.”

“Nor would I expect the same of you.” Hannibal’s ball of yarn fell off the edge of the couch when he pulled out more string; Will got down on the carpet to search around under the sofa for it. This earned him a closed lipped but lingering kiss. “I’m sure you’ve heard the song *La Vie en Rose?*”

Will nodded.

“I like to think that while I can’t flip the switch, as you described, my analytical lens is tinted pink.”

Will smiled, the song playing in his head.

It was interrupted by Hannibal saying, “I’m casting off.”

Will got up quickly and knelt next to Hannibal’s side of the couch. “You remember how to do it?”

“I do. But I’d like you to observe,” Hannibal said. One stitch at a time, he cast off the scarf from the needles. Perfect. As if it could have ended any other way. Anything Hannibal decided to do he’d be perfect at, Will thought.

“You did it,” he said with a crooked smile. “Feel… accomplished?”

Hannibal nodded, drawing the scarf through his hands. Then he turned and looped it around Will’s neck. “There you are.”

“For…” Will placed a hand on his chest. “Me?”

Hannibal nodded with a smile. Will stood up and looked at himself in the mirror on the wall near the front door. “I love it. I think Millie would approve.” He began unwinding it from his neck.

“What are you doing?” Hannibal asked, “taking it off already?”

“It’s hot,” Will said. “It was like 80 degrees today.” Then, “Oh, don’t give me that look. I love it, but it’s almost June.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal suggested, getting to his feet, “you wouldn’t be too warm wearing it if you weren’t wearing some of your other things.”

“Oh, is that right?”

“I’m a doctor, so I am aware of how body heat works,” Hannibal said, adjusting the scarf and stretching the neck of Will’s tee shirt wide to slip it over his head. “Is that more comfortable?”

“Still too hot,” Will said with a smirk. So, Hannibal undid his jeans and slid them down as well. “Almost there,” Will encouraged him as Hannibal got back to his feet, kicking off his boxers so that only the scarf remained.

“Comfortable?” Hannibal asked.

“Perfect.”

“I’d have to agree.” Hannibal’s gaze traveled Will’s nudity like his hands might, a visual caress. Will was still too hot, but he had a feeling that had a lot more to do with the way his cock was filling out than the actual air temperature or the wool scarf around his neck.

Hannibal grasped the scarf and pulled him in for a rough, sweet kiss. “So smooth,” he murmured, stroking Will’s face.

“Watch the beard burn,” Will reminded him as Hannibal guided him toward the couch by the two ends of the scarf, constricting it around his neck just the tiniest bit.

“No promises.” In fact, Hannibal reclined Will on the arm of the couch and deliberately ran his stubble along Will’s inner thighs, working slowly up from his knee to the center on one side, and then the other, the rasping noise barely audible over Will’s suddenly pounding heart. He teased Will’s cockhead with those aristocratic lips, plush and rounded and always a shade or two darker than the rest of his face. It was a wicked mouth, Will thought, and so fucking good at everything it did, an extension of Hannibal himself. It spoke pretty words in many languages. It kissed, sweetly or violently, depending on the mood. And now it opened, the warm, powerful muscle of Hannibal’s tongue cradling his cock, welcoming it into the inner sanctum.

Will’s reverie was interrupted when Hannibal wound his hand around the scarf and pulled it with a playful yank, then twisted it in his hand to give himself something to hold onto as he opened his throat and really went for it. Will rested a hand over his, curling his fingers around Hannibal’s and the woven fibers of the scarf, every stitch a moment in time, a prayer for the future.

S/O on the Local News

Chapter Summary

Uh oh.

“It’s starting!” Trudi came into her faux-wood-paneled living room with a big bowl of popcorn and three cans of beer tucked under her arm, Muffy at her heels. She plopped down on the couch right between Hannibal and Will, both of whom were being used as furniture by purring cats. Will tolerated the little brown tabby but Hannibal stroked the black and white one lovingly, a smile on his face.

On Trudi’s big TV was the local news. Tonight, they were showing an interview with the Beef Queen herself, and Trudi invited them down for a watch party.

The broadcast began. “Breaking news tonight,” the anchor said, looking gravely into the camera. “The Adams County Sheriff’s department is reeling from an early morning fire that completely destroyed their office in Corning. The historic building was being rewired in an attempt to modernize the station. The department had just purchased a document scanner that would have been able to digitize decades of paper files, including case files from crimes going all the way back to the late 1800s. When the scanner was plugged in for the first time, it became clear that the building was going to need rewiring. Let’s go to the scene with our field reporter, Taylor Patterson.”

The coverage switched to another reporter standing in front of a shell of a building that looked like an old school. “That’s right, Landon,” the perky blonde said, gesturing to the ruins behind her. “The fire Marshall is still unclear what started the blaze, but says the likeliest culprit is the electrical work that was being done. Lost in the fire were the department’s cold case files, and no digital copies remain. Evidence from numerous crimes was also destroyed, a nightmare for Sheriff Briggs and his deputies.”

The report switched to a taped interview with an older, portly man in a sheriff's uniform, who spoke into the camera. “I can tell you this. Those contractors that messed up on our electrical system will be charged with obstruction of justice and evidence tampering!”

Will noticed a glum-looking Deputy Nost skulking in the background of the shot, big hat in his hand. Then the camera switched back to the reporter in the field. “Sheriff’s department deputies haven’t even been able to sift through the rubble yet, as the fire hasn’t been completely contained. Once the structure is no longer a threat, it can be properly searched. A dark day for law enforcement. Back to you, Landon.”

Will slowly swiveled his head to look at Trudi. She was eating popcorn, throwing little kernels to Muffy. “Too bad,” she said. “That building had a lot of history. That was the local

high school back in the day. The Historic Preservation Commission ladies are gonna have a cow."

Will glanced at Hannibal. He had his eyes on the screen, petting the cat, a little self-satisfied smirk on his face.

The Beef Queen's interview went very well; Trudi's niece was well-spoken and not at all camera shy. And Hannibal managed to make it through an entire can of Busch Light. Will expected the seals to open and Armageddon to come before that happened.

Trudi talked them into a few card games, and they played for a while as Trudi switched over to White Claw and grew steadily more flushed and animated when she finished the first one. The mood felt… *celebratory*.

At last, they took their leave. They'd walked to her house and wanted to get on the road before it got too dark – young men in enormous trucks liked to drive at insanely fast speeds on the gravel roads, the oxymoron of the hip-hop music they blasted not lost on Will.

They strolled along the gravel, the sound of the loose rock under their feet the only sound rolling over the freshly planted fields aside from evening birdsong. "So," Will said as Hannibal slid their palms together, "that's where you went last night." Then, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you might want to come along," Hannibal said, "and I didn't want to risk it."

"That's not fair," Will said. "What happens to you happens to me. We're… conjoined."

Hannibal's eyes were wet. He raised Will's hand to his mouth and kissed it. Once, twice. Once more. "I know. I hope you can forgive me – I did what I thought was best."

"I suppose Trudi's husband's case file was in that building," Will mused.

"So unfortunate. Yes, it was. And the Medical Examiner's reports, the tapes of the autopsy…" Hannibal shook his head. "Up in smoke."

Will snorted out a laugh. "Does she know what you did?"

"She ought to. She was there. It was more therapeutic for her to overload those circuits."

Will shook his head. "Does she know… who we are?"

"She knows that we are all *dear* friends," Hannibal said. "My act meant so much to her she shared the secrets of her scotcheroo recipe with me after."

"Bet you've got a few recipes to trade back," Will said with a smirk.

"If only her husband's remains were still fresh…"

Small Couch

Chapter Summary

Will the small couch hold them both? Time for a stress test.

Will hauled the small antique wicker couch out of the garage and took it around the side of the house to the patio. Hannibal was already there, freshly showered after his morning run, drinking iced tea, and reading one of Millie's cookbooks, which was apparently published by the local church. He looked mildly frightened of the description of something called "tater-tot casserole."

Hannibal got up when he heard Will and watched him position the freshly painted piece of furniture on the patio near the back of the house, under the kitchen window, moving the flowerpots filled with petunias and marigolds to either side. Will had washed and repaired the cushion as best he could and stepped back to let Hannibal see.

"Lovely," he said, approaching to put a hand on the back of Will's

neck. "It looks old."

"Probably 19-teens," Will said, dotting sweat from his brow with his forearm.

"Is it usable?"

Will chuckled. "It's in great shape. The attic was hot and dry enough to preserve it really well. But... I mean, I haven't sat on it yet." He held out an inviting hand. "If it'll hold you, it'll hold me."

Hannibal eased himself down on the little couch and relaxed back against it. Got up and down a couple of more times. "Seems very sturdy," he said.

"I reinforced the joints," Will explained. "Should be good."

"One more test," +Hannibal insisted, holding a hand out to Will.

"That's a one-man couch."

"Not for long," Hannibal insisted.

Will shook his head with a smile. "Okay. But if it breaks, you're in trouble."

"Don't threaten me with something I'd enjoy," Hannibal replied and Will's cheeks reddened. He squished on the cushion next to Hannibal, who scooted over as far as he could, wrapping

an arm around Will's shoulders. It was a tight squeeze, but the little wicker couch held up beautifully.

"Let's try..." Hannibal shifted Will so he was seated next to the higher side, and lifted Will's legs across his lap. "Perfect." He rested his elbow on the back of the sofa and could easily reach Will's face, which he caressed, then stroked his hair, arm draped over Will's thighs.

"Structural integrity achieved," Will said, wiggling a little. Still solid.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal said, running his fingertip over the curve of Will's ear. "What are your thoughts on penetrative intercourse?"

It was a good thing Will hadn't been drinking anything because he would have spit it out. As it was, he sucked in a breath and choked on it. He took a second to cough. "Uh..."

Hannibal just waited patiently.

"I've never... with, um..." Will looked down at Hannibal's arm cradling his thighs instead of his face.

"A new experience," Hannibal prompted softly.

"Yeah, you could say that."

"Is it something you're interested in exploring? You can tell me honestly. In fact, I want you to be candid, Will. We've spent this month talking about many, many things, but there has been very little discussion regarding bedroom matters. We've been letting our actions speak for us."

"I... hadn't thought about it." Lie. Of course, he knew this moment was coming. He'd just assumed it would happen... in the moment, somehow, even though he assumed some basic preparations might be a good idea.

"Would you give it some consideration, then, and let me know?"

"Uhm, yeah, sure," Will said, trying to extinguish the heat on his face.

"If it helps, I'd like to be on the receiving end."

"Oh." Will had definitely *not* considered that.

"Take your time," Hannibal said, running his fingers through Will's hair again.

Will was saved from any further conversation by the crunch of gravel under tires. Trudi was here for her daily coffee and chit-chat. She appeared momentarily around the side of the house carrying a basket – more chicken and duck eggs, probably. "Well, look at you two - got room for one more?" she joked with a licentious wink. "If you two ever get hitched, I'll buy you a bigger one."

"I prefer this size, actually," Hannibal said, patting Will's leg before they stood up.

"Me too," Will agreed.

(alternate) Oh, I Can't Wait to Do It!

Chapter Summary

The Murder Husbands DO IT.

“I’m ready, Will,” Hannibal assured him again.

“Are you sure?” Will’s tone was hesitant, serious. He lifted the lube bottle to squirt some more into his hand.

“Will. “Hannibal put his hand over Will’s and eased the bottle out of his grip. “I’m ready,” he repeated.

“Okay,” Will said. Now that his brain and heart accepted it, he was shaking. He was so eager – he hadn’t felt this much anticipation for sex since his teenage years.

Hannibal got on his hands and knees. Will marveled at the curves of his ass for half a second before moving in close, lifting himself and pressing the head of his cock against Hannibal’s entrance. He slid in, trying to take it slow, keeping his movements at a minimum. Oh God. That was… nothing like he’d ever felt before, the tightness, the warmth and the way it gripped him…

He froze when Hannibal made the tiniest sound of strain. “Are you okay? Should I stop?”

Hannibal chuckled, looking over his shoulder at him. “Don’t you dare.”

Fuck. That was *hot*. Will grasped Hannibal’s hips again and kept going, little rocking motions that finally, *finally* evolved into thrusts. “Oh *fuck*,” Will groaned, reveling in the way Hannibal’s inner workings seemed to grip and hug his length.

He tried valiantly to hold on, but Hannibal was backing up into him in time with his thrusts. And the sounds he was making – Will was delightfully tortured by a torrent of memories of the cool, calculating suit-wearing Dr. Lecter, thrilled by the complete difference in what he saw now, the long swaths of bare flesh with musculature beneath, the shadow of beard on his angular face, how his hair, wild with sweat and their extended foreplay moved in time with their rutting.

It was too much. “Han—!”

And he lost it, pleasure flooding him. He folded forward and clung to Hannibal’s back, breathing hard. “Sorry,” he panted. “Damn it. That’s a… personal worst.”

“I had you *very* worked up,” Hannibal assured him. “I’m sure when it’s your turn I’ll be similarly overcome.”

Will slowly eased out with a groan and slid onto the bed. Hannibal turned carefully to take him into a sweaty, sticky embrace. “How did it feel?”

“Amazing,” Will said immediately. He braced himself internally and asked, “You?”

“I can only pray to the capricious, cruel god above that you’ll be ready again in a few minutes,” Hannibal said with a softly playful smile.

“Amen to that,” Will said, crossing himself. “Dear God,” he pretended to pray up to the ceiling, “we know, ah… you’re beyond measure in your wanton malice and matchless in your irony or whatever, but, uhm… if you could make my dick hard again A-S-A-P… that would be great.”

Hannibal snuck his hand between Will’s legs, cupping his recovering cock and giving it a loving caress. “Don’t pray to God,” he scolded with a playful kiss. “Pray to me.”

Misdialed Call

Chapter Summary

Enid doesn't know how to use Facebook.

"Fuck," Will groaned as he heard the phone in the hall ringing. 7 am. His thighs were sore and he'd definitely pulled something in his back the night trying to give Hannibal the hard railing he'd asked for. Mission accomplished, but those particular muscles hadn't been used in quite some time.

He struggled out of bed, half-tangled in the damp sheet. Despite his ungraceful dismount, Hannibal didn't stir. Apparently, he was even more worn out than Will was. Will stumbled, naked, into the hall and picked up the phone. " 'llo," he mumbled through his dry throat and kiss-swollen lips.

"They know."

Will froze. It was Trudi's voice. She sounded grim and exact. His heart iced over in a white-out blizzard of anxiety.

He knew what this was. It was a courtesy call.

The authorities were coming. It was time to flee, to leave the farmhouse behind forever with no chance to say goodbye.

"No…" he breathed.

"Hold on a sec, is this Pam?"

"Uh," Will stuttered. "N-no. Trudi?"

"Oh, Christopher, I'm sorry, hon, I probably woke you up! I was trying to call my friend Pam! See, we're planning this surprise party for Earl and Justine Michaels and that dumb bunny Enid went and blabbed about it on Facebook. She doesn't even know how to do Facebook! She thought she was messaging me and she ended up posting on her wall... I swear to God, if a thought passed through her mind, it'd be the shortest trip in North America."

Will felt the ice melt, the frost around his heart evaporating in tiny increments. "Oh," he managed. "Yeah, no, that's, uh... that's too bad. About the party."

"Sorry for the early call, sweetie! I'll see you two later today."

"Bye, Trudi." Will slowly hung up and returned to the bedroom. Hannibal was still asleep, sprawled out half on his back, chin tipped up, lips slightly parted. Will gazed with pride on the big suck bruise he'd left on Hannibal's shoulder, livid and brightening up nicely.

Mine, he thought.

Will slid back in and snuggled close. Hannibal stirred, but only rolled closer to Will, throwing an arm around him. Will didn't go back to sleep. He didn't want to. He wanted to be conscious for this. This moment. Because even if the authorities weren't on their way, it wouldn't be like this forever. Today was like the delicate crust on one of Hannibal's signature crème brûlées. One tap, and it would shatter.

But even broken, it would still be sweet.

And so, he stayed awake for another couple of hours until Hannibal finally opened his eyes, enjoying every second, locking it away, tucked up nice and safe in the memory palace.

Sounds from Above

Chapter Summary

THE RACCOONS ARE BACK

Hannibal shifted in bed. Will felt it, half in-and-out of his dreams, which had been peaceful lately. He was just about to drop off again when he heard it. Scritch scratching and chittering coming from the bedroom ceiling. This called him to complete wakefulness with a sinking heart. "Goddamn it," he hissed, rubbing his face.

Hannibal sat up beside him, propped on his elbow. "We'll have to start charging them rent."

Will smiled in spite of himself with a little spat-out laugh. "I don't know where the fuck they're getting in from," Will complained, even as Hannibal stroked his hair back from his forehead and kissed him.

"Think of it like a crime scene. What is their design?"

"Their design is *pissing me off*," Will complained. He did, however, quit bitching when Hannibal's thumb brushed his exposed nipple.

"Maybe we can scare them away," Hannibal reasoned, though these measured words came through a playful smirk Will could see, even in the dim lighting. "You said you were thinking about leaving the radio on in the attic to make them believe there were humans present at all hours. Certain loud noises might encourage them to reconsider."

"I, uh, I wonder what kind of loud noises you're thinking about," Will said with wry irony as Hannibal kissed his neck and slid his hand down Will's chest toward the front of his boxers where he cupped Will's soft cock, rubbing it through the fabric with slow, sensual movements.

"You always hold back," Hannibal said between presses of lips and flicks of his tongue. Damn it, once he learned about that magic spot on Will's neck, he'd been treating it like his own personal light switch. "Even though there are no neighbors for miles around, no one to hear us except these 'critters' you despise."

"What, you want me to, uhm..." Will trailed off.

"Vocalize, yes." Hannibal licked a hot, wet line down from his navel, moving Will's underwear out of his way. "If you're looking for inspiration, you can start by moaning my name."

"H-Hannibal...!"

"Louder," Hannibal encouraged before applying deep suction.

"HANNIBAL!"

Hannibal gave him a cheeky wink, lips still wrapped around his cock. Will couldn’t believe it, but he was actually glad the raccoons had gotten in again.

Passage Through a Fence

Chapter Summary

Trudi's chickens got out, and she's all the way at Walmart. What are two good cannibal neighbors to do but try and help?

“Will!”

Will’s head jerked up. He’d been in a state of deep meditation, sitting on the log by the pond with his fishing rod held loosely in his hand. He’d never put much stock in mindful practice, but he was starting to understand what the hype was about.

He didn’t wake up with gnawing anxiety the second he opened his eyes anymore. These days he felt clear, calm, and steady. Might have something to do with the steady amount of sex he was having, too. Orgasm therapy.

He looked up to see Hannibal at the tree line. “Trudi called. She’s in a bit of a spot, I’m afraid.”

Will shot to his feet. “Did the cops…”

“No,” Hannibal soothed with a smile as Will quickly reeled in his line. “Trudi is out shopping. Another neighbor called to let her know the poultry has escaped.”

“The ducks and chickens?” Will grabbed his tackle box and followed Hannibal back to the house.

“Apparently. But she’s all the way at Walmart. So,” Hannibal turned back and held the kitchen door open for Will, “this is a rescue mission.”

Will set down his things on the kitchen table and they headed out immediately.

There were four white Pekin ducks out in the side yard, sitting in the shade of the lilac tree. The chickens, however, were nowhere to be seen.

“I’ll check the coop.” Will got out of the truck with his toolbox. There was no sense in putting the birds back in if there was an escape route. Hannibal stood watch over the ducks as Will examined the wood and chicken wire coops and fenced-in area attached to it. There was a house for the ducks and the chickens with a shared run, and the ducks then also had a pond that wasn’t fenced in. Will found the hole near the bottom corner of the fencing and set about repairing it, then carefully checked the rest of the setup.

Returning to Hannibal, he said, “I know who did this.”

Hannibal turned, pale brows raised. “Have you discovered the criminal’s design?”

Will nodded grimly. “Fucking raccoons again.”

“Your mortal enemies.”

“*Our* mortal enemies,” Will said. “I’m gonna have to set some traps.”

“For now, we must save these damsels in distress.”

“All right, ladies, field trip’s over.” Will bent over and picked up a duck. She quacked irritably but then just went limp and let Will carry her in his arms. Hannibal followed with another. She tried to peck his arm, but the rounded tip of her bill wasn’t dangerous at all. “That must be Pecky,” Will said. “I think this one is Quackers.”

They put the ducks in the fixed coop and went back for the other two. The large, cumbersome birds could only waddle so fast, and they were too fat to fly, so Long Neck and Snowy were easy to catch and contain.

That just left the chickens. And that, they discovered, was a whole different story.

“Okay,” Will said, leaning his hands on his knees and panting. “That scene in ‘Rocky’ makes a lot more sense now.”

Hannibal was fast, and Will was suitably impressed when he caught four of the five, especially when they started collaborating. Hunting together. But the last chicken, a sleek black creature, was simply too fast and too smart to be lured in by food.

At last, they gave up, sinking onto the grass, panting and groaning and chuckling intermittently. “You can see,” Hannibal said, “how they evolved from dinosaurs.”

“Yeah, that thing’s a fucking velociraptor,” Will said.

“We gave a valiant effort. But I’m afraid she’s on her own.”

They lay next to one another in the shade of the lilac bush, surrounded by the scent of the blossoms in the gentle breeze. Clouds drifted overhead against the bright blue sky.

“May I ask you a question, Will?”

“Sure.” Will folded his arm behind his head.

“How close…” Hannibal stopped and reworded his sentence, not something he often did. “When did you choose me over Jack Crawford?”

Will turned his head to look at him. Hannibal was looking at the blossoms above and the sky beyond. “When you asked me to run,” he said.

“But before then, you were determined to capture or kill me.”

“Kill,” Will corrected with a grimace. “We were pretty sure there would be no taking you alive.”

“Quite right.” Hannibal paused. “What changed your mind?”

Will moistened his bottom lip, looking at the clouds. “It was clear to me… in that, uh… in that moment… that you were less concerned with my Becoming and more interested in… us being together. That in your mind it was better to leave now and not risk being separated ever again.” He let out a breath. “I felt… special. You didn’t think of me like your other patients you’d convinced to kill. That I was more to you than Randall Tier or Bedelia du Maurier.”

Hannibal rolled over and propped himself up on his elbow. “Will,” he said, stroking his stubbly-again cheek. “You’re everything to me.” He bent in slowly and pressed a kiss on his forehead, then his lips, Will’s hand stealing up to touch him above the hip, fingers dragging against his sweat-dampened linen shirt.

“Whoooo!” came a raucous shout from the driveway, followed by a wolf whistle. They sat up to find Trudi getting out of her car. She was wearing one of her special Walmart shopping outfits – bedazzled denim capris, her best pair of pink crocs, and a floral-patterned peasant top, her hair carefully poofed up and frozen in place with a myriad of hair products whose odors Hannibal said made him dizzy. It was not Trudi’s way to be caught in Walmart in sweatpants and a tee-shirt, no – that was acceptable attire for Casey’s General Store and Dollar Tree only.

Will got to his feet with a sheepish smirk and extended a hand to help Hannibal up, who in turn brushed bits of grass from his back, giving his ass a clandestine squeeze.

“You’re just in time to help me with the groceries.” Trudy opened the trunk and the back doors of her sedan, revealing two berths laden with gray plastic shopping bags.

After unloading and greeting Muffy, Trudi nourished them with tall glasses of iced tea. “Well, I sure appreciate the help with those damn birds,” she said, putting away a monumental amount of diet soda in her fridge as they lingered in the kitchen. “I’ll bring over some Oreo fluff tomorrow, how’s that sound?”

Will chuckled and elbowed Hannibal, who slid a hand behind to pinch his ass again. “We weren’t able to catch the black one,” Will admitted. “She was too fast.”

“The two of you actually tried to catch Speedy Gonzalez?” Trudi was incredulous, the freezer open, a stack of Cool Whip tubs in her hands. “No wonder you’re such a sweaty mess! Oh, don’t feel bad, she’s a wily one. I’ll head out around dusk. If I leave the car out of the garage, she likes to roost on it. Then I can just pick her up and pop her back in the coop.”

Will groaned, thinking about the 45 minutes they’d spent trying to trick Speedy into the coop or trap her between them. Will had even rigged up the old “box with a stick” trap. Speedy had just looked at it, and then at them, her beady little eyes seeming to say, *are you fucking serious?*

Trudi finished putting the cold and frozen groceries away, then paused, her hand resting on the counter. She chuckled, shaking her head. “You two,” she said, “are so adorable I just about can’t stand it. It’s so sweet it’s gonna give me a cavity!”

Will smiled at the floor, feeling Hannibal slip an arm around his waist.

“It makes me wanna do my life over again,” she admitted, cracking open a White Claw. “All those years with Dick. What the hell was I thinking? Well, I know what I was thinking.” She took a sip, then reached down to pet Muffy, who stood on her back paws and rested her front ones against Trudi’s thigh, as if sensing her distress. “I was thinking, all my friends are getting married. Everyone keeps asking me if I’ve found the right guy yet. Folks at the high school reunion talking crap about the gals who were still single, y’know?”

Hannibal nodded as if he understood completely the plight of a single Midwestern woman.

“You can’t, ah… be too hard on her,” Will said.

“On who, sweetie?”

“On… young Trudi,” Will explained. “How old were you when you married Dick?”

“Twenty-eight.”

“And that was how long ago?”

Trudy pointed a finger at him. “Don’t you dare ask a woman her age, Christopher.”

They shared a laugh. “What I’m saying is,” Will went on, “that other Trudi, she… didn’t know. Like you said, she had a lot of people pressuring her.” He felt Hannibal’s hand slip into his own. “Society pressured her, telling her what was right and wrong when… she never had a chance to investigate what was right for *her*.”

“Exactly!” Trudi said after another slurp of Claw. “Young Trudi didn’t know she was signing up to be a… whore and a maid for the rest of her life, pardon my French, on top of working full time I might add.”

“She felt duped, once she figured it out,” Will said.

“Betrayed,” Hannibal added.

“And so, she did something about it.” Trudi drained her can and set it on the counter with a dazzling smile.

“So, she did. And she took her life back,” Hannibal affirmed. “Now, you have to decide if you want to share it with someone else.”

“And be really, *really* choosy,” Will suggested. “But, ah… it’s never too late. Boris and I met… later in life… and only got together after a lot of, uhm…”

“Drama,” Hannibal finished for him.

“Ooohhhh!” Trudi clutched her entwined hands to her chest as if hugging an invisible teddy bear. “You two are finishing each other's *sentences*! Heavens to Betsy. Well, I see what you’re saying. There’s a difference between being alone and being lonely. Maybe one day I’ll find me a man who deserves me, right?” She pulled out three more White Claws from the fridge and forced them into Hannibal and Will’s hands after cracking them open. “Let’s drink to that, boys!”

Will and Hannibal eyed the cans reluctantly. “Oh, come on, y’all, I feel like celebrating. Y’know what they say, ain’t no laws when you’re drinking Claws! Stick around, let’s have some drinks, and when the sun sets, I’ll teach you how to catch a stubborn chicken.”

Hannibal raised his mango White Claw and Will tapped his watermelon one against it with a besotted smile. They were lucky. He was lucky. Unlike Trudi, he’d managed to listen to his heart instead of caving to the pressure of society, morality, the FBI. It’d been touch and go, but he realized now just how right his choice had been.

Hannibal sipped his White Claw and tried, Will could tell, not to make a face. “Laws don’t typically concern me, so I’m interested to see what happens as I consume this,” he said.

“Come on out on the deck. We can listen to Taylor Swift!”

As they followed Trudi and Muffy through the house, Hannibal paused and caught Will’s arm, then his lips, for another lingering kiss. “It’s never too late,” he said softly.

“Damn right,” Will whispered back.

Recycling

Chapter Summary

> The Boy Scouts are collecting bottles and cans, and Hannibal does have a lot of wine bottles...

Will was on the roof of the house, balanced precariously on a flat space, looking for holes that might lead into the attic. Without a proper ladder he couldn't get around to the other side to check, so he was going to have to give up and just set his traps and hope for the best.

He loaded the live capture trap and baited it with a can of wet cat food, then prepared to crawl back through the open window. He paused when he heard tires on the gravel. It was almost supper time and Trudi never came this late in the day. He crouched half-in and half-out of the window to see who was coming up the long gravel drive.

It was hard to see, being backlit, but he would swear it looked like a police patrol car.

He shimmied inside and went to the bedroom, slipping his gun from between the mattress and the box spring, then stuffing it in the back of his jeans, tugging his shirt hem over it. Sweat stained his brow and drenched his underarms in seconds as his brain pumped his body full of adrenaline. The knock on the door jarred his heart further.

He met up with Hannibal in the living room. Hannibal seemed to take one look at his face and understand the danger. He nodded. Will crept out the kitchen door and went around the side, as was their plan. Through the branches of the bush he hid behind, Will glanced at the car again, squinting in the low setting sunlight.

The person behind the wheel got out. Will felt an ease in the tension – the woman was wearing leggings and a sporty tank top, sunglasses perched on her head and her hair in a slightly messy ponytail. She looked like a soccer mom.

He heard Hannibal answer the door. "Hello," said a child's voice. "I'm, uhm… my name is Jayden and I'm with the Boy Scouts, we are collecting cans and bottles to recycle and earn money for our camping trip. Do you have any you would like to donate?"

"Do you take wine bottles, Jayden?"

"Uh, yeah."

"I'll be right back. I want to make sure they're clean."

Hannibal went inside and returned a few minutes later. Will could hear the clanking of glass as Hannibal gave the kid some empty wine bottles. Cleaned, Will assumed, of fingerprints

and DNA, just in case, and gathered tidily together in a shopping bag.

“Thank you!” The kid clomped down the stairs with his bag and got back in the car. Will realized the car had, at one point, been a police cruiser. You could tell by the extra light on the side of the door. But the woman must have bought it used from a law enforcement auction. There was no decal on the side and no antennae for the radio. They drove away and disappeared back onto the main road.

Will went inside, taking his gun out of his pants and setting it heavily on the kitchen table. Hannibal entered and approached him. Will reached for him instinctively and pulled him in for a hug. “I hate it,” he admitted, murmuring against Hannibal’s neck.

“Being on the run?” Hannibal asked.

“Thinking they’re going to find us. Jumping at every noise.” Will shook his head against Hannibal’s shoulder. “It’s… wearing on me.”

“I know,” Hannibal soothed, putting a cool hand on the back of his neck. “I know.”

Will heard a thickness in his voice and pulled back to see tears in Hannibal’s eyes. “Being on the run was much easier,” he said, “when I was alone. When it was only myself I was risking. Things are very different now.”

Will kissed him, once, twice, longer now, tasting a tear on his lip.

“I’ve told myself it’s something I’ll have to get used to. I fear I never will,” he continued, another tear slipping from the inner corner of his eye and traveling down the edge of his nose.

Will hugged him again, and Hannibal held him almost crushingly tight.

“If it’s this or being apart forever. I know what I’d choose,” Will murmured. He pulled back and tried to smile. “So, cheer up. We have raccoon traps set, and whatever you’re making for dinner smells great.”

They both knew it was a distraction, but Hannibal dried his eyes and served dinner.

Lottery

Chapter Summary

Hannibal's just a silly little guy who laughs at human sacrifice.

Will wasn't a voyeur necessarily, but he did enjoy watching Hannibal when Hannibal didn't know he was there. Will had just come around the side of the house to ask about lunch when he heard Hannibal laughing. It was so much more than the restrained smiles and chuckles he usually emitted, so Will's interest was piqued.

Hannibal was seated at the outdoor table under the gaudy umbrella with a book in front of him, laughing with genuine, adorable amusement. Will let himself linger by the bushes for a few moments, enjoying uninhibited Hannibal as he turned pages and emitted delightful little bursts of laughter.

At last, Will made his presence known and sauntered over. "You got a pretty smile." He'd meant to say something far wittier or at least subtle or complex or using double entendre, but that was what came out. He didn't like that Hannibal immediately brought out the Mona Lisa smile again, the close-lipped little secret expression.

Will cleared his throat. "W-what are you reading that's got you in stitches?"

"A delightful short story," Hannibal said, eyes fairly sparkling with enjoyment. "People in a small agrarian community, not unlike this one, undergo a yearly ritual lottery where the person chosen is stoned to death — while the narrative structure saves the obvious twist for last, the real twist is certainly that the reason for the ritual sacrifice has been lost to time, and yet it is continued despite its obvious brutality." He let an open-lipped smile slip across his features again. "Brilliant."

Will's eyes slowly widened. "Wait a sec… you were reading 'The Lottery' by Shirley Jackson and… *laughing your ass off*?"

Hannibal just looked at him. "Yes," he said simply.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Will cursed, though it didn't take more than two seconds for him to break and start laughing in his own right.

"Indeed. I haven't laughed so much while reading a book since I read the Bible," Hannibal said, dead serious. Will lost it, tears streaming down his face.

"Hey you guys!" Trudi came around the side of the house with her basket of eggs. "What's so funny?"

Will had to sit down at that point and wipe his eyes. When they cleared, the first thing he saw was Hannibal looking at him like a man in love.

Feeling of Doing Nothing

Chapter Summary

Somebody gets "done," but then these two achievers let themselves be lazy.

Will climbed back into the window with a muffled curse that was a direct contrast to the sweetness of the morning birdsong. The raccoon trap had been sprung, the bait gone, but no raccoon! Why were they so fucking crafty?

He was getting outsmarted by small furry fucking critters. "Varmints," Will muttered. "Scum. Slime. Menace to the golfing industry. Probably be replaced by the rat." He didn't remember the exact line from the movie, but it lightened the mood enough for him to crawl back in the window with a smile on his face.

And there was Hannibal, watching him shimmy back in. "Any luck?"

"No, I'm gonna have to figure out something else," Will sighed.

"Or you could take a well-deserved break," Hannibal suggested, drawing closer and lifting Will's hand to remove his work glove, tossing it carelessly on the floor of the spare bedroom with the terrible daybed.

"Oh, I suppose I could." Will let him toss off the other glove.

"You're very American in some ways, Will," Hannibal told him as he began to lazily unbutton Will's sweaty work shirt. "You equate your productivity with your worth, when you must know that you could accomplish very little and still be precious."

"My dad instilled the whole 'put in a hard day's work' thing," Will admitted. "And isn't that a little pot-kettle-black? You're productive as hell. Master of two instruments…"

"Three, if you consider piano and harpsichord different, which I do," Hannibal corrected.

"...and all those papers you wrote..."

"True," Hannibal said. "But right now, in this place and time, we have the luxury of laziness. Better yet, we have a chance to experience the feeling of doing *nothing* together."

"Oh, we're not doing *nothing* right now," Will said as Hannibal slipped his shirt off. "There's a reason they call it a blow *job*."

"Is that what we're doing?" Hannibal smirked. "I was thinking of giving your industrious nature a challenging task, since you seem to derive pleasure from achievement."

"Oh yeah?" Will tipped his head back when Hannibal went in for a kiss, forcing him to press his lips against Will's neck instead. "What's that?"

"It's hard work; are you sure you're up for it?"

"I'm not afraid of a hard day's work, you know that," Will teased. "Or a long, hard job."

"It's actually not terribly strenuous." Hannibal stroked his hair back from his forehead, tracing his fingers down Will's bare shoulder blade. "In fact, all you have to do is lay back and relax as much as possible. I'll do the rest."

Will's eyes widened. Okay, then. Today was the day.

"Do you think you could handle that?" Hannibal asked, stroking his cheek. "If not, I'm sure I can find another job for you."

"N-no, I'm... ready," Will said. "I'm ready," he repeated with more certainty.

Hannibal smiled, wider now, a hint of teeth. "I know you'll rise to the occasion."

Will snuck a hand between them and cupped Hannibal's cock, which was already filling out. "I think one of us already has."

"You never fail to inspire me, beloved."

God, Will loved how he said that word.

An hour later, they were definitely not doing nothing. Will had taken a long bath, washing everything carefully, doing some careful trimming and shaving. He'd returned to find Hannibal in bed, naked already, reading a book like everything was totally normal, though the air was thick with anticipation.

"Still feeling ready?" Hannibal asked, setting his book aside. "And you can say no, Will."

"No, I'm, ah… extra ready now," Will had said, dropping his towel and sliding in.

Hannibal went all out with the foreplay, instructing Will not to lift a finger, luxuriating in kissing him, teasing his nipples, stroking his body with tender hands, sucking his cock, then lifting it out of his way and easing his face between Will's cheeks to find his hole. "I'm going to use my tongue now," he announced, so clinically Will had to laugh, even though he was still a little nervous. Hannibal took that as a green light and dived in to eating him out.

This was new. This was weird. This was *amazing*, holy shit…! A tongue, Hannibal's tongue, with all its sensitive powers of smell and taste, swirling and licking and briefly penetrating the most shameful place on his body was a sensation so intoxicating Will was afraid he was about to spill, a kind of soul-orgasm.

Hannibal pulled back and wiped his mouth delicately, then squirted some lube in his hand, warming it vigorously between his palms. Will knew the drill, so to speak, and nodded. Now,

slick fingers teased him open. Will bit his lip as the first one slipped inside. Hannibal went slow and easy, kissing his knee and thigh intermittently as he went. “How do you feel?”

“It’s good,” Will said. “It’s all good, you can keep going.”

Stretching, more and more, little by little, pausing now and again to dip Will’s cock into his mouth, and… it began to feel better than good. “I’m ready,” he blurted suddenly, without thinking.

“Are you sure? I think we should–”

“I said I’m ready,” Will argued, nerves making him sound more irritated than he was. Hannibal smiled fondly, as if he knew, and grabbed the lube bottle to anoint his cock.

Will made as if to turn on his stomach and put his ass in the air, but Hannibal stopped him. “No, Will. Face to face.”

“Oh.” Will hadn’t known you could do it like that. Well, he would have assumed it was possible, he just had never thought about it.

“I’m sure you’ll be flexible enough.” Hannibal gathered Will’s legs up and bent them, holding himself up on one hand and working his cock with the other. He briefly repositioned, and then Will felt the warm thickness press against his opening. He tensed up for a moment, then took a breath and relaxed. First ring. Second ring. It hurt, then, and Will whimpered into the back of his hand. He expected Hannibal to stop then, to check in on him, but he kept going, which ended up being the merciful decision. Once he was in, and moving, it felt better. Good. Great. Heavenly.

Face to face was the right choice. Hannibal kissed him with such fierce reverence, devouring his mouth for a few moments before worshiping it, and his neck, kissing and licking, sucking Will’s skin between his teeth in harmless bites as he pumped his hips. Will reached down to touch himself, reveling in the feeling of fullness, and an insane sense of connection he’d never felt before. Hannibal guided his hand away and took Will’s cock in his own lubed grip, pumping it in time with his thrusts, determined not to make Will do the tiniest fiber of work.

Will felt his pleasure pooling, his legs tensing up, a searing heat gathering in his lap. He came, arching his back with a loud cry that softened into a moan, his seed spurting up onto his bare chest and spilling over Hannibal’s hand.

Hannibal let go of his softening cock and gathered him up, holding him close. “I love you,” he whispered into Will’s neck as he rolled his hips a few more times before releasing, filling Will with a glorious warmth he could feel deep inside.

“I love you, too,” Will vowed through his ragged post-coital breaths.

Even with Hannibal’s erection fading, they lay like this, still connected, neither of them wanting to move and break the place where they were joined.

At last, Will's growling stomach interrupted the serenity. They got up and showered, made lunch, then spent the day doing the actual nothing Hannibal had promised.

This included taking a walk down to the pond, Hannibal picking a cornflower on the way and tucking it behind Will's ear. "Do you know the lyrics to *La Vie en Rose?*" he asked as they approached their log by the water.

"Sure," Will said. "My dad used to work for a guy who was related to Louis Armstrong, and everybody in New Orleans knew it. All day long in the engine shop they played his records. Sometimes I'd go in and help out if I had the day off from school, and I learned 'em all."

Hannibal threaded his arm through Will's as they strolled the edge of the water, watching the insects skim the glassy surface. "Will you sing it for me?"

Will scoffed through a smile. "What?"

"Will you?"

"I'm not much of a singer."

It was Hannibal's turn to scoff. "I disagree."

Will furrowed his brow. Then his eyes widened. "You heard me out in the shed, didn't you?" His cheeks flamed furiously at the thought.

"I did. Though I swear I wasn't trying to eavesdrop."

"Oh, yeah, right, Mister Serial Killer Stalker Guy," Will said through a wry smile. He cleared his throat, looked up at the sky, then down at his feet. Taking a breath, he gave it a go.

"Hold me close and hold me fast,

the magic spell you cast,

this is *la vie en rose.*

When you kiss me heaven sighs,

and though I close my eyes

I see *la vie en rose…"*

He grazed his lower lip with his teeth and looked over at Hannibal to gauge his reaction. Hannibal's eyes were shining, wet with a sheen of tears. "Don't stop," he begged softly, putting his hand on Will's arm.

"You sure?"

"Your singing voice is very pretty," Hannibal promised him. "And I'm not saying so simply because you let me fuck you a few hours ago."

Will cracked up laughing, tossing his head back. “Okay, all right, uhm…” He hummed a few bars, then sang again, Hannibal catching both of his hands and holding them.

“When you press me to your heart,

I'm in a world apart,

a world where roses bloom…”

Will grinned, and decided to give his Satchmo impression a try for the next bit:

“And when you speak,

angels sing from above;

ev - 'ry - day words seem to turn

into love songs.”

Hannibal reached up and tugged the hair on the back of his head with a little teeth-hint snarl that turned into a smile. Will switched back to his regular voice and found himself giving it more air as his confidence grew.

“Give your heart and soul to me,

and life will always be

la vie en rose.

Keep me close within your arms.

Entrance me with your charms.

This is *la vie en rose…”*

He paused as if to stop, but Hannibal shook his head, as if to say, *I don’t think so.* Will sighed as if annoyed and took one hand out of Hannibal’s grasp. Reaching behind, he cupped a handful of ass and continued the song.

“Thrill me with your tender touch,

I crave it all too much.

I feel *la vie en rose.*

When you softly gaze my way,

my burdens melt away,

and happiness is mine…”

Now he just put his hand on the side of Hannibal's face, feeling the fine cut of his cheekbone, tracing his thumb over the corner of his mouth. Softly,

"And where you go,

let me always be near.

Even in darkness my soul's light

will find you.

Give your heart and soul to me,

and life will always be

la vie en rose…"

Hannibal barely let him get the last word out before smothering him with a kiss. "Bravo," he said after a long tangle of lips and tongue. "That was beautiful, Will. I have a new appreciation for the Americanized version of the song now."

"Americanized?" Will asked as they turned to walk slowly back towards the house.

"Yes, the original lyrics were written in French. A lyricist named Mack David re-wrote the song for singing in English, but what he produced can't really be called a translation, aside from the line '*la vie en rose*'."

"I 'spose a direct translation didn't rhyme o-or sound good with the music?" Will said, watching a rabbit dart across their path.

"Indeed. Would you like to know the real translation?"

Will nodded eagerly. "You gonna sing it to me?"

Hannibal smiled, the crease between his eyes a little sad. "Alas, no. I have mastered many instruments, but the one that lives in my throat seems to forever elude me."

"Oh, come on," Will begged.

"I was mute for a time after Mischa died," Hannibal reminded him. "And it was during the beginning of my adolescent development. Some parts of me withered."

Will nodded in silent understanding, drifting his hand around Hannibal's waist. They'd reached the back yard and parted only to sink down into their lawn chairs. Hannibal crossed his legs elegantly, and recited the translated lyrics, his eyes on the tree line instead of looking directly at Will, a mirroring of Will's earlier shyness.

"Eyes that kiss mine,
A smile that hides under his mouth

A portrait that needs no touching up,
From the man I belong to

When he takes me into his arms
He speaks to me in a soft voice
I see life in pink hues.

He says words of love to me,
Everyday words,
And that does something for me.

He has entered into my heart
A part of happiness
From which I know the cause

It's me for him and him for me
In life, he said it to me, and swore it for life.

And once I realize
Then I sense it in myself
My heart that's beating

Nights of love that don't end
A great happiness that takes its place
Troubles, griefs, bad times
To die from happiness

When he takes me into his arms
He speaks to me in a soft voice
I see life in pink hues.

He says words of love to me,
Words he says every day,
And that does something for me.

He enters into my heart
A part of happiness
From which I know the cause

It's me for him and him for me
In life, he said it to me, and swore it for life.

And once I realize

Then I sense it in myself

My heart that's beating."

Will reached over and squeezed his hand affectionately. "I'll sing anything you want," he promised. "Any time you want."

“Sing it again, then,” Hannibal said, looking at him now, voice laden with meaning. “Please.”

Will took a breath and began.

A Midnight Snack

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will say goodbye to the safehouse they made into a safehome.

Will paused before descending the narrow attic stairs and turned toward the scratching and chittering he heard somewhere behind the chimney. "Well, you won. It's all yours." The raccoons stopped moving, leaving in their wake a kind of reverential silence. "Hope you're happy here," Will said softly, with a half-smile. "I know I was."

With that, he descended the stairs and lifted them back up again into the ceiling, leaving the cord to dangle, swaying gently in the hallway. It was hard not to keep things. Will was taking his scarf, no question, but he was also tempted to pilfer everything that had a memory attached; the mechanical shopping list, knitting needles, an apron, one of the cookbooks. He only had the one bag, of course, and it had been stuffed pretty full when they'd arrived.

The letters between Bob and Millie they left out on the kitchen table, organized by date, tied in bunches with faded ribbons. The hope was that someone would recognize them for the treasures they were. On the way out of state in the morning they'd drop Trudi's egg basket off at her house and say goodbye.

Will had protested Hannibal using his signature calligraphy to write it, but Hannibal pointed out that Trudi had more reason than the average person to protect their secret, just as they'd protected hers. Now the bags were packed and sitting by the door. The plan was to catch some sleep, then leave at dawn, locking up the house and leaving the keys under the doormat. Ditch the truck, switch cars again, and head for Georgia, where they'd get their new passports from the dead drop, buy a boat, and that would be it. Goodbye forever to the United States of America.

Will thought he would feel worse about never walking the swamps of Louisiana again, but that ache was dull and far away. Right now, he wanted to treasure every second of newly planted cornfields, nesting cardinals, lilacs, and even waging war against clever wildlife.

This place wasn't some random house. Not even a safehouse to hide from the law. It'd only taken a month, and it was a *safehome*.

They left the house in immaculate condition. Every small need tended to, from oiling the hinges on cabinet doors to Hannibal ironing every apron, tablecloth, sheet, and cloth napkin before replacing them in their respective drawers.

They didn't talk about it. That last day, they just did it, moving from room to room, Hannibal cleaning, Will fixing crooked picture frames or tightening screws. As they readied themselves

for bed, the last night under this particular roof, Will asked, "Did you... add this place into your memory palace?"

Hannibal nodded with a sad smile, folding back the light quilt and sheet on the bed. Their bed. "And you have a key to enter any time you'd like," Hannibal offered as they lay down together. Will kissed him and cuddled close after Hannibal switched off his bedside light.

They lay in the white-noise dark, listening to the air conditioner wheeze and struggle. After about fifteen minutes, Will sighed. "I don't want to go to sleep. Because I don't want tomorrow to come."

Hannibal slid on top of him, kissing his lips, then his neck. "So don't sleep."

They made love slowly to stave off the morning. But as hard as Will tried, he did eventually finish, which was gratifying physically of course, but had an air of finality that made him sad. Last orgasm here. They took showers just to take them.

When Will finished drying off and pulled on his boxers again, Hannibal wasn't in bed. He found him downstairs, sitting at the kitchen table eating the last of the second batch of Oreo fluff. The final hunk of Trudi's most recent batch of scotcheroos sat on a plate in front of Will's chair with a glass of milk. "Worked up an appetite?" Will said, trying to lighten the mood. "What happened to calling this stuff an abomination?"

Hannibal smiled, dipping his spoon in again. "It is. But many who live in this house know how to love a monster. And others are deeply grateful for it."

Will started eating to keep himself from tearing up. One last batch of dishes. They got dressed and sat out back to watch the sunrise. Just after dawn, the phone rang.

"Trudi's at it already," Will said, hauling himself up out of his chair and going inside to answer it. He heard the scrape on the concrete as Hannibal followed. It was time to leave anyway, and Will winced as he heard the kitchen door lock behind them. Last time on the patio.

He picked up the phone. "Hey there, you're up early," he said.

"... Will?" came the voice on the other end. Will's heart stumbled and his blood went cold. Surely, he was hallucinating. The encephalitis was back. Was he awake? Was this a dream? "Will, are you there?"

"... Abigail?" he managed to say, locking eyes with Hannibal.

"Yeah, it's me. Are you heading out soon? I wanted to know when to meet you at the boat."

Will locked eyes with Hannibal. His silhouette was blurry a moment before the tears in his eyes finally fell. Hannibal approached and pulled him into an embrace, then plucked the receiver out of his hand. "We're leaving in five minutes. See you in about 24 hours," he said.

Will couldn't speak. He just cried into Hannibal's jacket.

"Okay, see you soon,” Will heard her say through the phone.

"Take care, Abigail." Hannibal hung up and gently guided Will's face up to look at him. "Shall we?"

"Yeah," Will said, wiping his eyes with a smile. “Let’s go.”

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